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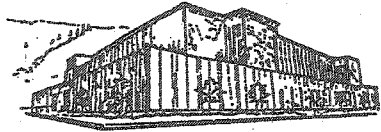
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“HIGHLY QUALIFIED” SECONDARY EDUCATORS: PERSPECTIVES FROM A
RURAL COMMUNITY

by

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"Highly Qualified" Secondary Educators: Perspectives from a Rural Community

Director: David R. Erickson *de*

Recent changes in federal law require that all public school educators be "highly qualified" by the 2005-06 school year, but many rural districts already face grave challenges in staffing their classrooms. In Montana, the percentage of teachers with provisional certificates continues to increase, and a significant number of secondary educators—especially those in high-poverty schools—have neither a major nor a minor in the subject area they are teaching.

To examine teacher shortage in relation to the requirement that all educators be "highly qualified," the author explored the issue from the perspectives of those who would be most impacted: the residents of a small Montana community. To apprehend the phenomenon from diverse points of view, she asked, "What answers to the problem of teacher shortage in the secondary content areas might those from the many walks of life in a rural Montana community envisage?"

The researcher employed a qualitative, phenomenological research design to illuminate and examine common ideas in the human experiences that surround the issue. The researcher exposed the *essence* of how these rural residents make *sense* of the issue, information that may be useful for others who are struggling with the issue in similar contexts. Most importantly, she condensed observations into language that provides thick description of the phenomenon.

The researcher found that the very identity of a rural community is intricately connected to its schools. Rural residents have much to say about education; they contribute to the professional conversation. They envision and communicate solutions: more on-site teacher education, better use of interactive television and the Internet to deliver coursework, college credit for high-school classes, and loan forgiveness.

In the interpretative, qualitative mode, conclusions and meanings are subject to the perspectives of the researcher and to the multiple perspectives of those engaged in the phenomenon under study. The researcher revealed a *process*, one that attempted to express an authentic, yet multifaceted, portrayal of human experiences. She reasserted the notion that each person's voice adds value to conversations about education and that perspectives heretofore not considered add to the body of knowledge that informs decision making.

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Chapter I

The Problem

Rural communities in Montana, like similar communities throughout the United States, are suffering from an unparalleled shortage of teachers. According to D. Puyear, executive director of the Montana Rural Education Association (MREA), many rural schools in the state begin each academic year with only half the teachers they need (personal communication, August 28, 2002). Further, a full 20% of Montana secondary educators do not possess even a minor in the field they are teaching; in high-poverty schools the numbers are worse: 30% of Montana's secondary educators are teaching out of field (Jerald, 2002, p. 8). To make matters worse, "approximately 1,500 to 1,600 Montana educators will be eligible for retirement" each year until 2006 (Nielson, 2002, p. 4). Montana teacher education programs graduated 1045 students in 2001-02, but only 29% stayed in state to teach (Nielson, 2002).

Low teacher salaries are often mentioned as the primary reason certified teachers, new and practicing, leave Montana; the state ranks 46th in the nation for average teachers' salary (Nielson, 2002). District administrators "overwhelmingly identified Montana's low salaries as a primary factor in teacher turnover and inability to recruit qualified personnel" (Nielson, 2002, p. 12). Furthermore, teachers in rural Montana schools earn significantly less than teachers in larger Montana districts:

‘The Last Best Place’ may not be able to court and keep teachers because of the scenery and small class size unless salaries and benefits are improved for this group of teachers who teach in Montana’s most remote schools and for all the others as well. (Morton, 1999, p. 10)

Despite current and anticipated shortages, recent changes to the Elementary and Secondary Education Authorization Act (ESEA) direct that all teachers be “highly qualified by the end of the 2005-06 school year” (United States Department of Education (USDOE), 2002c, p. 1). The federal definition of “highly qualified” (see below) will force some practicing educators, especially those teaching out-of-field, to complete additional college coursework and/or to pass state examinations. The hue and cry arising from the education establishment about this and other federal school-related mandates, collectively known as No Child Left Behind (NCLB), may be largely immaterial because the public-at-large supports this directive. The recent Phi Delta Kappa (PDK)/Gallup Poll of public attitudes toward education indicates that a full 96% of respondents “support requiring teachers to be licensed in the subjects they teach” (Rose & Gallup, 2002, p. 42).

Purpose and Rationale

The purpose of this study is to discover and understand the phenomenon of teacher shortage from the unique perspectives of members of a rural Montana community and to give voice for possible solutions to those who are most effected. The extent to which NCLB will impact rural communities already struggling with teacher shortage has yet to be established. It is already well documented that rural classrooms labor to staff

their classrooms (Jimerson, 2003; Davis, 2001; Nielson, 2002), but this study will investigate rural community perspectives on the new federal mandates surrounding “highly qualified teachers” and their ideas about ways to solve the problem of secondary teacher shortages.

My decision to emphasize community resolutions follows logically from NCLB directives that give districts “the flexibility to find local solutions to local problems” (USDOE, 2002d, ¶ 4). Further, because communities are complex networks of people, institutions, and cultural realities, I have elected to design a study centered on conversational interviews not only with members of the educational establishment, but also with people from the community at-large. After all, rural communities depend on local schools as a means of self-identification and social cohesion (Howley & Eckman, 1997). Because the life of a community is intricately connected to its schools, it makes sense to solicit opinions from those people most directly and indirectly impacted by changes in educational laws.

Furthermore, empowerment of community members is one current recommendation for addressing the teacher shortage in Montana’s rural areas. In fact, Nielson (2002) suggests that education schools work harder with community groups and other agencies to establish partnerships to coordinate efforts to better serve the needs of rural communities:

More concerted and coordinated efforts between agencies, colleges, schools, and education organizations are needed to meet the staffing needs in rural Montana.

Although efforts exist to deliver teacher education programs to remote locations, there is no plan to assure access to these programs for people who are committed to their rural communities. Coordinated action would maximize the efforts of other entities struggling to serve the needs of rural communities....” (p. 13)

Research Questions

If schools of education are to work more effectively with rural communities to solve problems of secondary teacher shortage, we must first identify the implications of the federal definition of “highly qualified” in a typical rural community. Therefore, it behooves us to seek out the perspectives of members of a rural Montana community as they relate to teacher shortage and to teacher development in the secondary content areas.

To get at the essence—the heart and soul—of these issues, I will focus on the following research questions:

1. What answers to the problem of teacher shortage in the secondary content areas might those from the many walks of life in a rural Montana community envisage?
2. Would changes in secondary certification requirements encourage more rural community members to consider teaching middle and/or high school as a career? If so, what changes would need to be made?
3. What role might Montana schools of education play in developing middle and high school teachers from within rural communities, especially in relation to recent changes in ESEA?

4. What importance do members of a rural Montana community attach to their local secondary school(s)?

Of course, other questions are expected to present themselves as a result of the conversational nature of the interviews. The researcher will not be surprised if the study results in more questions heretofore not considered than in actual answers.

Limitations and Assumptions

This study is limited by the omnipresent human bias of the researcher. Eisner (1991) identifies the “self as an instrument” that connects to the phenomenon and makes meanings of it (p. 33). Consequently, qualitative researchers must be aware of the self in relation to the phenomenon under study. Through purposeful reflection, a qualitative researcher must cultivate “a heightened awareness of one’s worldview, experiences, preconceptions, biases, and so on...” (Piantanida & Garman, 1999, p. 140). In essence, “the quality of the portrayals and, in turn, the credibility of the dissertation rests upon the student-researcher’s capacity for insightful, recollective, introspective, and conceptual reflection” (Piantanida & Garman, 1999, p. 144). The researcher’s thorough understanding of the phenomenon under study will serve to counter bias and confirm the verité of the inquiry.

The nature of interpretive inquiry. Indeed, the subjective nature of interpretive inquiry—and its potential for bias—calls into question qualitative inquiry as a legitimate form of research. By definition, the researcher in a qualitative study *participates* in the phenomenon under review, and she interprets its essential qualities through the lens of

her own experience. The researcher seeks not to quantify understanding; rather, she desires to craft a portrayal of the “salient features of the phenomenon” in an attempt to capture the essence, the qualities, of the experience (Piantanida & Garman, 1999, p. 135). Of course, the crafting of the portrayal depends upon interpretation, and interpretive “ways of knowing” are sometimes attacked for their emphases on discursive, rather than definitional, understanding (Piantanida & Garman, 1999, p. xvii). Nonetheless, it is assumed that the interactive approach of the methodology being utilized will elucidate a more “reflexive and intimate understanding” of the phenomenon under study (Berg, 2001, p. 73).

Developing understanding through narrative. As stated above, qualitative researchers strive to capture the *essence* of human experience in an attempt to develop greater and more diverse understandings. To craft a truthful portrayal, one that resonates with the voices of participants, the researcher will share her research by crafting a portrayal in words. She will create a narrative based upon active (and interactive) listening, copious notes, and tape recorded interviews. Again, narrative inquiry as a means of developing understanding is considered a limitation by some because of its inherently subjective nature. Nonetheless, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) explain that

for social scientists... experience is a key term. Education and educational studies are a form of experience. For us, narrative is the best way of representing and understanding experience. Experience is what we study, and we study it narratively because narrative thinking is a key form of experience and key way of

writing and thinking about it.... Narrative is both the phenomenon and the method of the social sciences. (p. 18)

In other words, to conduct narrative inquiry, the researcher walks deliberately “into the midst of stories” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 63). In essence,

as researchers, we come to each new inquiry field living our stories. Our participants also enter the inquiry field in the midst of living their stories. Their lives do not begin the day we arrive nor do they end as we leave. Their lives continue. Furthermore, the places in which they live and work, their classrooms, their schools, and their communities, are also in the midst when we researchers arrive. Their institutions and their communities, their landscapes in the broadest sense, are also in the midst of stories. (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 64)

Further, the essence of narrative inquiry is, at times, elusive for readers because it “has the compelling, sometimes confounding, quality of merging overall life experience with specific research experience, realms of experience often separated in inquiry” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 115). Readers expecting a research report lacking in voice and description are sometimes puzzled by what seems to be researcher bias, but is in fact an integral part of narrative inquiry. Piantanida and Garman (1999) call this likely pitfall the “science report syndrome” (p. 64). They argue that

this scientific conception... has become embedded in the dissertation folklore.

Yet this science report format has become less and less serviceable for qualitative dissertations, especially with the emergence of interpretive modes of inquiry....

(Researchers) have argued persuasively for a broader range of forms of knowledge representation. Also challenging the appropriateness of scientifically based structures for the proposal and dissertation has been the increasingly robust discourse on narrative forms of inquiry, which are grounded in the precepts not of science but of rhetoric, literary theory, and literary criticism. (Piantanida & Garman, 1999, p. 65)

In this study, the researcher assumes that qualitative inquiry, as presented in narrative, is subjective by its very nature. Bias on the part of the researcher is countered by a careful, detailed, and thorough reconstruction of participant voices and experiences.

Lack of participant expertise. Some might consider an apparent lack of expertise of interviewees to be a limitation of the study. Though ordinary members of a rural Montana community may not be well versed in the jargon of educators, phenomenological research methods encourage the setting aside of preconceptions to view, at its core, the human experience being studied. Further, the act of phenomenological research itself may serve to empower interviewees who might otherwise feel ineffectual in the face of a state-controlled entity, especially one as dominated by self-proclaimed experts as education (Green, 1978).

Researcher as outsider. Finally, the researcher is not a member of the community under study; she is an outsider. She may experience some initial disconnect with the community, especially in light of the official nature of the IRB-mandated consent forms. Using the school administrator as a gatekeeper, she will counter this limitation by

participating actively in the life of the community, but she will maintain professional distance.

It is assumed that three months of contact with the community will allow for a thorough understanding of the issues relating to a community's perspectives of the implications of NCLB and secondary teacher shortage.

Definitions of Key Terms

Highly qualified: According to NCLB materials, a highly qualified secondary teacher "holds a bachelor's degree and has demonstrated competency in subject area taught by passing a rigorous State test, or through completion of an academic major, graduate degree, or comparable coursework" (USDOE, 2002e, ¶ 2).

The USDOE's publication *NCLB: A toolkit for teachers* (2003a) states that a highly qualified teacher must have:

- A bachelor's degree
- Full state certification and licensure as defined by the state
- Demonstrated competency, as defined by the state, in each core academic subject he or she teaches.... The state can use this opportunity to streamline its certification requirements to the essential elements. It can also create alternate routes to certification. Regarding the third requirement, the need to demonstrate competence in the subjects the teacher teaches, states are provided with significant flexibility to design ways to do this, especially for core academic teachers with experience. (p. 12)

Federal law permits states to interpret the guidelines set by NCLB. In Montana, a highly qualified teacher is defined as one “who holds at least a bachelor’s degree, is fully certified, and demonstrates content knowledge in their teaching area” (Montana Office of Public Instruction, 2003, ¶ 12).

Rural: According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), a district is designated rural if it has a population of less than 2,500 (2000a, ¶ 14).

Chapter II

Review of the Literature

The potential implications of NCLB on secondary teacher shortage in rural Montana defy predetermined constructs. They are tied intricately to perspectives of individual human beings, a messy and convoluted prospect, to say the least. Nonetheless, this dissertation is based upon a theoretical framework that arose from a thorough study of the literature. This review will examine the following overarching themes:

1. ESEA 2001 (NCLB) stipulates that each state that receives Title 1 funds must ensure that all teachers of core academic subjects in the state are “highly qualified” by the end of the 2005-06 school year (USDOE, 2002c).
2. Attracting and retaining “high quality teachers” has been identified as the primary difficulty facing rural school districts (American Association of School Administrators, (AASA) 1999). Alternative Teacher Education Programs (ATEPs) have been shown to attract mid-career professionals into the classroom, thus increasing the pool of highly qualified teacher candidates (Chaddock, 1999; Feistritzer, 1999; Hirsch, 2001).
3. Rural education is significant in Montana. The state ranks second in the nation in the percentage of schools in rural areas and 6th in percentage of students attending rural schools (Beeson & Strange, 2003), and rural communities depend on local schools as a means of self-identification and social cohesion (Howley & Eckman, 1997).

Though other themes emerged, these three provide the foundation for the research described in this dissertation.

NCLB and "Highly Qualified" Educators

Perhaps no current issue in education today is as hotly contested—and as passionately debated—as the legislation known as No Child Left Behind. Nonetheless, understanding its key themes is integral to understanding the requirement that every classroom be staffed with a “highly qualified” teacher. No single element of this reform effort stands alone. Each must be viewed in relation to its greater whole, its context. In essence, to examine the implications of this reform on rural communities struggling with teacher shortage, one must first understand the thinking behind the reform itself. The components discussed herein provide an overview of the ideas at the heart of NCLB.

Though the law is much ballyhooed in the media and in the halls of academe, there seem to be wide disagreements as to what the mandates actually require. NCLB is indeed complex, but five key ideas predominate: high standards for all children; a focus on teaching and learning; the promotion of partnerships among families, communities, and schools; local control and increased flexibility; and accountability for results. Guided by these five key themes, the ESEA provides critical support for states, districts, and schools in creating vibrant learning environments where high standards are expected of all children and services are aligned to help children reach these standards.

High standards for all children. High standards are a key theme because the law stipulates that no child is to be denied the expectation that he or she can learn as much as any other child in his or her school, the state, and the nation. According to the U.S. Department of Education, (2002e), the law is designed to counter the present state-of-affairs in which students in poor schools are more likely to have less qualified teachers and achieve at lower levels than students in wealthier districts. (It has already been mentioned that children in high-poverty schools in Montana, for example, are more likely than their wealthier peers to have a secondary teacher who is not licensed in the subject being taught (Jerald, 2002, p. 8).) Schools, school districts, and states must use ESEA funds to help students reach high standards being developed by their respective states (USDOE, 2002c).

All children, including those served by Title I and other federally funded education programs, will be held to challenging standards, whether these were developed by previously existing state plans or by plans developed specifically to meet the NCLB requirements. To make this expectation a reality, schools, school districts, and states must work to align all components of education. Again, this is to counter existing situations in which material given on state tests does not correspond to material taught in classrooms. Montana, for example, is among the lowest ten states and the District of Columbia in aligning content standards to information covered on statewide tests (Olson, 2002, ¶ 4). According to NCLB, state plans must include an appropriate assessment mechanism to

provide accurate feedback regarding the progress achieved. The concept of alignment is critical to NCLB as a systemic school reform agenda (USDOE, 2002e).

At the heart of this theme is a powerful break with past practice and even past misconceptions. Adults must truly embrace the belief that all children—regardless of ethnicity or socioeconomic status—can learn to high standards in order to act in ways that encourage high levels of success.

Focus on teaching and learning. High standards set a goal for students to achieve, but it is an improved teaching and learning process that propels students to reach these standards. In addition to high standards, a number of critical elements must be in place in order for effective teaching and learning to occur. These include ongoing professional development opportunities that enable “highly qualified” educators to teach to challenging standards; high-quality curricula and instructional tools that facilitate learning; establishment of a climate in which teaching and learning are desirable and meaningful; technical assistance and support; and access to technology (USDOE, 2002e).

ESEA programs create greater flexibility for districts to provide opportunities for school staff renewal. In fact, most of the programs under the ESEA support a renewed focus on professional development and allow the use of federal funds for this purpose. Most programs include professional development as one of the critical uses of federal funds to effect change and improve educational programs. The law provides funding for a number of “teacher quality initiatives” and states and districts can avail themselves of a federally funded “teacher assistance corps” (USDOE, 2003a, p. 13).

In 2003, the federal government, under the auspices of NCLB, appropriated \$2,930,825,001 in state grants to improve teacher quality and promote the presence of “highly qualified” educators in every classroom (USDOE, 2003b, p. 6). In fact, the stated purpose of Title II, Part A is to help “increase the academic achievement of all students by helping schools and school districts ensure that all teachers are highly qualified to teach” (USDOE, 2003b, p. 1). Through NCLB, state educational agencies (SEAs) and local educational agencies (LEAs) receive funds on a formula basis, as do the state agencies for higher education (SAHE). In turn, each SAHE provides competitive grants to partnerships usually made up of schools of education, schools of arts and sciences, and high-need LEAs (USDOE, 2003b, p. 1).

In return, organizations that receive funds to improve teacher quality and ensure that each classroom is staffed with a “highly qualified” educator are held answerable to the public for progress in student academic achievement:

Title II, Part A provides these agencies the flexibility to use these funds creatively to address challenges to teacher quality, whether they concern teacher preparation and qualifications of new teachers, recruitment and hiring, induction, professional development, teacher retention, or the need for more capable principals and assistant principals to serve as effective school leaders. (USDOE, 2003b, p. 1)

With high-quality and sustained professional development, schools are more likely to have instructional programs characterized by what research has shown to be essential for any high-functioning school that helps students learn. For example, professional

development programs must incorporate certain essential components including instructional strategies that are based on effective means of improving the achievement of students. The federal government has identified eight key elements for professional development in the support of “highly qualified” educators:

1. All activities are referenced to student learning
2. Schools use data to make decisions about the content and type of activities that constitute professional development
3. Professional development activities are based on research-validated practices
4. Subject matter mastery for all teachers is a top priority
5. There is a long-term plan that provides focused and ongoing professional development with time well allocated
6. Professional development activities match the content that is being instructed
7. All professional development activities are fully evaluated
8. Professional development is aligned with state standards, assessment, and the local school curriculum (USDOE 2002f, slides 9-11)

Further, each district that receives Title I funds must spend “at least 5% of its Title I allocation on professional development activities to help teachers become highly qualified” (USDOE, 2003a, p. 14). This equates to at least \$600 million earmarked specifically for professional development to ensure teacher quality (USDOE, 2003a, p. 14).

No matter how much money is poured into professional development, these strategies cannot be carried out in a vacuum. For instructional strategies and well-prepared educators to result in high-achieving students, an environment conducive to learning is required.

School climate is essential to productive teaching and learning. Children, teachers, and staff need to be in an environment that is safe, orderly, and drug free. Parents need to feel that schools are safe places where their children can learn and teachers can teach. Yet, in both 1999 and 2001, students were more likely to be afraid of being attacked when they were at school than away from school (NCES, 2003, ¶ 17). The Safe and Drug Free Schools and Community Act (SDFSC), Title IV of ESEA, provides funds to support efforts of schools to create a safe, drug-free learning environment. The DOE, through its SDFSC state grants program, provides funds to support comprehensive and integrated approaches to drug and violence prevention in schools. Major changes to SDFSC under NCLB designed to improve, directly or indirectly, the teaching and learning process include community service for expelled or suspended students and increased mentoring programs (USDOE, 2003c, ¶ 4).

Promotion of partnerships among families, communities, and schools. Strong partnerships bring a vast range of talents and resources to bear on addressing the challenges students, teachers, families, schools, and communities face today; they are essential to the success of standards-based reform. Strong families and strong communities provide critical support for students who want to learn. Strong connections

between school, community, and business also have a powerful influence on the atmosphere for learning in a school and make possible both effective transitions from preschool to school and from school to work (USDOE, 2002a).

Parental involvement is considered a key aspect to NCLB. Children are better served when their parents and school are working together on their behalf, when schools welcome parents into the school, and when parents create an environment supportive of learning at home. For example, children with parents who are involved in their school tend to have fewer behavioral problems and better academic performance—and are more likely to complete secondary school—than children whose parents are not involved in their school (Henderson, 1994). Therefore, the ESEA enlists parents to help their children both at home and at school. It supports school-parent contracts that spell out the goals, expectations, and shared responsibilities of schools and parents as partners in student success. Further, NCLB stipulates increased communication between schools and parents (USDOE, 2003d).

The community is also considered an integral part to school reform. ESEA provides schools and communities with additional opportunities to connect with each other and coordinate services in ways that make a difference in the learning and lives of children and families. For example, Even Start, authorized in Title I, is a program that integrates early childhood education, adult literacy or adult basic education, and parenting education into a unified and cohesive family literacy program to provide educational opportunities to low-income families. To receive funds, recipients must form

a partnership between one or more LEAs and one or more high-quality nonprofit community-based organizations, public agencies other than an LEA, higher education institutions, or public or private nonprofit organizations (USDOE, 2003e).

Local control and flexibility. The needs of one community or one state may differ significantly from the needs of another. Therefore, a one-size-fits-all approach would be ineffective for states, districts, and schools in developing challenging standards, attracting and retaining “highly qualified” educators, and improving teaching and learning.

Although there may be broad goals that are common to all schools, there are numerous unique and equally effective ways to achieve these goals. If districts and schools are accountable for reaching challenging goals, they should have the flexibility to do so (USDOE, 2002c).

To help improve the teaching and learning process, NCLB “provides states and local communities the option of combining federal resources to pursue their own strategies for raising student achievement” (USDOE, 2003f, p. 1). In other words, states and local districts may transfer funds from one federal program to another to best meet their own unique needs. Further, districts may use federal monies to find their own innovative ways to strengthen teaching including “alternative certification, merit pay and bonuses for highly qualified people who teach in high-need areas like math and science” (USDOE, 2003f, p. 1).

Flexibility for rural districts is outlined explicitly in the changes to ESEA:

“[NCLB] provides rural schools and districts more flexibility to spend federal funds on

priorities that are unique to those communities” (USDOE, 2003f, p. 1). The changes that pertain to local control of schools may contribute to increased community involvement, especially in regard to teacher development. This empowerment of rural communities may prove to counter a disconcerting trend toward a distancing between localities and their schools:

If the schools have failed us, it's because they got too big, too far away from the “us” who knew the kids best, and too standardized and uniform to respond to the particulars of each child and each community.

Schools are the one institution that could construct for the young what it means to be a member of a real community, made up of adults of various ages alongside youngsters of various ages. Such schools offer a way of learning together in the most efficient and productive way the species knows how, through the company we keep, by people we trust and want to emulate. That's what schooling has traditionally meant. (Meier, 1999, ¶ 8)

Accountability for results. “Highly qualified” educators, high standards and high-quality aligned assessments provide a critical framework for making accountability to the public possible. For example, NCLB takes a performance-based approach to accountability that requires that each school and district receiving Title I funds demonstrate, on the basis of the state assessment and other measures, adequate yearly progress (AYP) toward meeting state standards. States are required to monitor and identify schools that fail to make adequate progress and, thus, need improvement and

technical assistance. If a state finds that such a school continues to fail, corrective action may be taken. States are also required to reward schools that show success in helping their students meet their state standards.

Perhaps no other area of NCLB has been as contentious as the focus on accountability. Educators fear that increased assessment will result in a test-centered curriculum, and initial indications from high-stakes testing states like Texas show that such concern may be valid. Nonetheless, the changes to ESEA stipulate that schools must make AYP in order to continue receiving funds (USDOE, 2003g, ¶ 4). In essence, NCLB attempts to hold schools and teachers accountable for what students do or do not learn:

- Every student should make substantial academic progress every year and in every class. Good instruction will ensure they (sic) meet this goal.
 - Annual testing tells parents and teachers how much progress students have made toward meeting academic standards.
 - Annual tests show principals exactly how much progress students at each grade level have made so that principals and teachers can make good decisions about teacher training and curriculum.
 - Accountability systems gather specific, objective data through tests aligned to standards and use that data to identify strengths and weaknesses in the system.
- (USDOE, 2003g, ¶ 5)

Again, the NCLB legislation is much debated, but one must understand its key themes before tackling the issue of “highly qualified” teachers. No single element of any

reform effort stands alone. Though the whole is greater than the sum of its parts, demarcating the parts is a necessary step in the development of holistic understanding. Quintessentially, to examine the implications of this reform on rural communities struggling with teacher shortage, one must first and foremost attempt to understand the thinking behind the reform itself. The five components discussed above provide an overview of the ideas at the heart of NCLB.

Rural Teacher Shortage, "Highly Qualified" Teachers, and ATEPs

States other than Montana—such as Alaska, Pennsylvania, and Iowa—face crises of teacher shortage, especially in rural schools (Chaika, 2000). In fact, the main problem rural school districts currently face is attracting and keeping high quality teachers (American Association of School Administrators, 1999). Like salt on an open wound, the NCLB requirement that all teachers be “highly qualified” may prove to exacerbate this problem:

Teacher quality requirements under No Child Left Behind (NCLB) have added new complications to preexisting challenges by calling into question common strategies—such as multiple-subject assignments—commonly used in small and rural districts to staff schools. While few superintendents anticipated problems in meeting teacher quality requirements, perceptions may change as NCLB proceeds to full implementation in 2005-2006, when teacher quality requirements will pertain to *all* teachers working in the core academic subjects. (Schwartzbeck, 2003, p. 4)

Though it is still too early to determine exactly how the “highly qualified” requirement will impact staffing in rural schools, “early case studies on how NCLB is being implemented indicate that attracting highly qualified teachers is, in fact, a major concern in rural districts” (Schwartzbeck, 2003, p. 6). The problem is particularly grave in secondary schools because more secondary teachers than elementary teachers fall short of being “highly qualified,” especially in the middle grades:

Overall, three times more teachers at the secondary level (9% across all districts) were estimated by responding superintendents to fall short of the federal criteria as “highly qualified,” compared to elementary teachers (3%). The shortfall varied by district size, with smaller districts estimating larger shortfalls of teachers. A full 20% of secondary teachers in districts with fewer than 250 students were estimated by superintendents to fall short of the federal definition of a highly qualified teacher.... (Schwartzbeck, 2003, p. 8)

To address teacher shortage in light of NCLB, many state educational agencies have actively involved communities by re-examining the routes by which one becomes an educator. Traditionally, those who wish to teach in secondary schools must complete a bachelor’s degree in a liberal arts or science discipline along with education courses leading to state-specific certification. This process typically takes from four to six years. Programs that permit those who have bachelor’s degrees to enter the classroom without the usual certification courses are considered alternative teacher education programs

(ATEPs). These programs may or may not include intensive seminars in teaching methodology.

ATEPs—many based in local communities—have been called upon to provide teachers to underserved areas since the 1980s (Feistritzer, 1993). Teacher shortage is most often cited as the primary reason districts look to ATEPs for educators (Feistritzer, 1998, 1999; Haselkorn & Harris, 1998; Dial & Stevens, 1993; Wise & Darling-Hammond, 1992). Further, rural regions have been identified as being among those areas most in need of teachers (Roth, 1994).

Moreover, the number of ATEPs has increased strikingly in the past 20 years (Chaddock, 1999). One oft-cited reason for the increase in ATEPs is the emergence of populations other than traditional college-age students who wish to become teachers. These populations include community members, older professionals, liberal arts graduates, former military personnel, returned Peace Corps volunteers, and paraprofessionals (Chaddock, 1999; Feistritzer, 1999). Indeed, nontraditional certification of teachers often brings to the fore the voices of parents and community (Berliner, 2001). For example, alternatively certified teachers are more likely to take active roles in the community of the school, to be involved in extracurricular activities, and to be active forces for change in their schools (Herr, 1997).

Montana's Office of Public Instruction (OPI) is beginning to examine alternative ways to attract highly qualified educators to teach in high-needs areas, such as special education. For example, OPI's Special Education Endorsement Project "provides

stipends for already certified teachers to obtain a special education endorsement while on the job. To date, 117 students have completed the program, and 65 are currently enrolled. Preference has been given to teachers in rural settings” (Nielson, 2002, p. 6).

To fill vacant positions, Montana districts strapped for personnel may turn to Class 5 provisional certificates and emergency authorizations. Provisional certificates allow administrators to hire teachers who do not have endorsements in specific high-needs areas. Class 5 certificates

are awarded for a maximum of three years to allow an already certified person to complete requirements for endorsement in that subject area. Emergency authorization is awarded for essential positions that must be filled but have no qualified persons available. (Nielson, 2002, pp. 7-8)

Since 1998, statewide emergency authorization has increased by a full 300%, and the number of teachers employed with provisional certificates has increased 65% (Nielson, 2002).

The Northern Plains Transition to Teaching (NPPT) program at Montana State University (MSU) is another way in which alternatively prepared teachers may enter Montana’s classrooms. The specified objective of the program is to “provide highly qualified and competent educators to meet the hiring needs of secondary rural schools in Montana, Wyoming, and South Dakota (with hopes to expand to serve the other rural states in our region” (NPPT, 2004, ¶ 1). To meet its mission, NPPT has identified the following goals:

1. To recruit, through the Montana and High Plains Troops to Teachers regional office, rural and reservation communities, and regional professional organizations, highly qualified professional adults holding baccalaureate degrees appropriate to the content area they wish to teach
2. To develop a compressed-format, alternate route to licensure training program for these professionals to include six concentrated and rigorous course offerings, delivered at a distance (with Web-based technology), and to enable candidates to enter the field in a supervised year-long paid internship after the initial qualification phase (i.e., after the first nine credits)
3. To place new teachers primarily in high need Local Education Associations (LEAs, or school districts) and other rural schools in NPTT states....
4. To support and retain these new teachers, by providing classroom mentoring by master teachers; an on-line help center for problem solving; a corps of visiting university faculty, matched by discipline whenever possible; and regular cohort meetings for faculty, mentors, and new teachers at state meetings
5. To develop the distance-delivery infrastructure and partnerships needed to continue to recruit and support transitioning mid-career professionals interested in pursuing a new career in teaching beyond grant funding and, in the process, serve as a national model for other institutions interested in developing alternate route licensure programs (NPTT, 2004, ¶ 2-6)

Perhaps most impressive is NPTT's success rate in placing its "graduates" in high-needs subjects and/or locales. Of the 27 members of NPTT's 2003 cohort group, 23 are currently teaching in 18 districts throughout Montana and the surrounding area: Troy, Bigfork, Joplin, Malta, Nashua, Box Elder, Frazer, Pablo, Simms, Missoula, Harlowton, Hamilton, Wakpala, Mobridge, Belle Fourche, Casper, Green River, and Cheyenne (NPTT, 2004).

One of the inherent strengths in the NPTT program—and in many other ATEPs—is that working adults are not required to quit their jobs and work full-time as unpaid student teachers for four full months as they are in most traditional teacher education programs. The 15-week student teaching requirement is enough to make many adult professionals, some of whom have families and mortgages, dismiss teaching as a feasible career option.

Montana's neighbor to the west, Idaho, recently adopted a statewide alternative route to teacher certification: Passport to Teaching. The move came partly in response to NCLB's requirement for "highly qualified" teachers. Like many rural states, Idaho faces a teacher shortage in many of its middle and high schools. (A December 22, 2003 search of online job postings for secondary teachers in Idaho found openings for three math teachers, three science teachers, one ESL teacher, three English teachers, two music teachers, and two special education teachers, all to start immediately.) Furthermore, in some smaller schools, a single educator is often responsible for teaching several subjects even though she or he may not be certified in each content area.

To help ease shortages and to help teachers become fully endorsed in the subjects they teach—and thus become “highly qualified”—the Idaho state board of education voted 7-1 to adopt Passport to Teaching’s national, test-based system of alternative certification as one option for the state’s educators and educators-to-be (American Board for Certification of Teacher Excellence [ABCTE], 2003, ¶ 1).

The ABCTE path to certification joins four other ATEPs already in place in Idaho: Alternate Route Approvals; Misassignments; Letters of Authorization; and Consultant Specialists. In 1998-99, 30% of Idaho’s new hires were from one of these pathways. In other words, more than 1,500 new Idaho teachers were alternatively certified (Snyder, 2001, p. 26).

The first ATEP, Alternate Route Approvals, provides teaching opportunities for those individuals who have a bachelor’s degree and a strong background in content but who lack specialized training in pedagogy. To become a teacher, an individual must apply to the state for official consent to teach in a public school. She or he must obtain a teaching position within three years of initial consent and complete an “individualized professional preparation program of studies” (Snyder, 2001, p. 26).

Teachers are classified “misassigned” if they have certification but if they are teaching in an area in which they are not endorsed. Only six credits of coursework in a subject are required to be “misassigned” (Snyder, 2001, p. 26).

The Letter of Authorization is similar to Montana’s programs for emergency credentialing. School districts may request a Letter of Authorization from the State Board

of Education in instances where a certified teacher cannot be contracted to fill a professional position. To be considered for a Letter of Authorization, one must hold a bachelor's degree from an accredited college or university (Snyder, 2001).

Finally the Consultant Specialist position permits individuals who are uniquely qualified for a specific assignment to serve as a teacher even though they may lack formal education or teaching knowledge. In the 1998-99 school year, 192 new teachers were hired in Idaho as consultant specialists, 36 of whom did not hold college degrees (Snyder, 2001). The majority of consultant specialists are hired in computer education, language education, and special education.

Interest in ATEPs may be partially the result of the conclusion drawn by many state governments that the educational establishment is mired in bureaucracy. Even traditionally liberal states, such as Illinois, are looking at ways to streamline education and return control of schools to local agencies. Recently, Illinois' Democratic governor, Rod Blagojevich, outlined a resolute new initiative to pare down the state's top-heavy education system. According to the Illinois Government News Network (IGNN), a monstrous 2,800 pages of rules currently govern the state's system of schools and other educational services. In response, the governor's new plan calls for the complete elimination of the Illinois State Board of Education, as well as the creation of a task force to examine the formation of new ATEPs (IGNN, 2004).

Even traditional teacher education programs will face changes under the governor's new proposal:

Governor Blagojevich is proposing to create a Professional Teacher Standards Board. The board will administer the certification of teachers and other school personnel. All certification and program approval processes currently handled by the Illinois State Board of Education and the State Teacher Certification Board will be transferred to the new Professional Teacher Standards Board. Governor Blagojevich stresses the importance of the new board because ISBE has not fulfilled its responsibilities to certify teachers in a timely fashion or to provide much needed assistance to teachers regarding re-certification. (IGNN, 2004, ¶ 15)

Changes in bureaucratic procedures notwithstanding, some states with a number of rural districts, such as Texas, have created a network of regional centers to help develop and sustain teachers to encourage collaboration between teacher-training institutions and local communities (Plemons, 2000). Still other states and districts have created innovative programs to assist paraeducators in becoming certified teachers (Recruiting New Teachers [RNT], 2002). Despite the specific program employed for alternatively developing educators, Brown (2002) identified key attributes that contribute to teacher success. These include previous successful work experiences; positive relationships with others; prior work or life experiences that required problem solving; the opportunity to share experiences; effective communication and instructional skills; strong mentors; and supportive family members and friends.

Historical Perspective

Of course, the third millennium does not represent the first time the United States has faced a crisis of teacher shortage, especially in rural schools, and it is not the first time the country has looked to ATEPs and other ways of providing individuals with the credentials they need to staff classrooms:

World War II and the immediate post-war years witnessed the most severe crisis in teacher supply and demand that the nation had experienced, and all schools, not just rural schools, were affected. Teachers' salaries could not compete with the high wages being paid in jobs related more closely to the war effort and patriotism also pulled many away from their classrooms.... The number of emergency certificates issued by states rose from 2,305 in 1940-41 to 69, 423 in 1943-44. By the war's end, the number holding emergency certificates in the nation's schools was estimated to be 108, 932, about the same as the number of new teachers hired annually in normal times. (Angus, 2001, p. 21)

Despite unprecedented teacher shortages, the post-war years saw equally unprecedented increases in state controls over teacher certification processes: "The shortage continued well into the 1950s and emergency certificates were still being issued in the 1960s, but the push for higher standards did resume notwithstanding the shortage" (Angus, 2001, p. 21).

Nonetheless, teachers in the 1950s felt the strain of an increasingly difficult job, and higher standards did little to improve working conditions, a fact that led to a revolving door phenomenon similar to the one faced in many classrooms today:

At the end of World War II, the American teacher corps was grossly overworked, underpaid, and demoralized. From their perspective, while the profession of education might have gained in power and prestige over the previous half-century, the benefits had not trickled down to them. They sensed no improvement in the status of the classroom teacher and saw no signs that teaching was about to be treated as a full-scale profession. (Angus, 2001, p. 22)

Partially as a response to a high turnover of educators in rural and urban areas, and partially to placate critics of traditional teacher education programs—most notably liberal arts college faculty—a number of ATEPs gained popularity in the 1960s, only to lose ground during the 1970s when shortages were not as keenly felt (Angus, 2001).

ATEPs came again to the fore in the 1980s. In 1983, half as many students graduated from teacher education programs as in 1973 (Feistritzer, 1984). Both Texas and New Jersey began statewide ATEPs in the 1980s, programs that required a bachelor's degree, 200 hours of pedagogical instruction, a passing score on a competency test, district-based supervision, and approval of the candidate by district officials (North Central Regional Education Laboratory, 2002).

Since the 1980s, ATEPs have grown in popularity—and not just among rural and urban administrators struggling to staff classrooms. Those decision makers who work to

increase diversity in a predominately white female teaching force are finding ATEPs to be a successful route by which to attract men and minorities to the profession. According to the School Reform News (1999)

- New Jersey's alternative certification route has been the biggest source of qualified minority teachers.
- In Texas, 41% of alternatively certified teachers are minority.
- 29% of those entering teaching through the Troops to Teachers program are from a minority group. (§ 3)

In fact, the Georgia Troops to Teachers (TTT) Program reports increased diversity as one of its most positive, if unintentional, outcomes:

Data show that while the TTT program is accomplishing its objective of supplying teachers in the high-need subject areas (e.g., Math, Science and Special Education) and high-need schools, it is also achieving some unintended objectives. Specifically, the percentages of males (80%) and Blacks (43.6%) going into the classroom as TTT are much higher than the corresponding percentages in the Georgia teaching workforce (18% and 20.6%, respectively). Thus, the TTT program is helping to diversify the workforce with regard to gender and ethnicity. (Kirkland, Neweke, & Stephens, 2003, p. 7)

Further, national data reinforce Georgia's findings. Results of three nationwide surveys conducted by the National Center for Education Information (NCEI) indicate that

- Nine out of 10 people (90 percent) coming into teaching through Troops-to-Teachers (TTT) are male. This compares with 74 percent of the overall teaching force that is female.
- Nearly three out of 10 (29 percent) TTT teachers are from a minority or ethnic group. This compares with only ten percent of the general public school teaching force that is from a minority or ethnic group.
- One in three (29 percent) TTT teachers, compared with 13 percent of all teachers, reported they were teaching mathematics. Eight percent, compared with five percent, respectively, were teaching biology. Five percent, compared with two percent, were teaching chemistry. Three percent, versus one percent, were teaching physics. Eight percent, compared with three percent, were teaching physical sciences. Eleven percent, compared with eight percent, said they were teaching general special education. Seven percent, compared with four percent, were teaching emotionally disturbed children.
- One in four (24 percent) TTT teachers is teaching in an inner-city school. Thirty-nine percent of them said they were willing to teach in an inner city and 68 percent indicated they would be willing to teach in a rural community. This compares with 16 percent of public school teachers who currently teach in inner cities and 23 percent who teach in rural areas. (1998, ¶ 9)

Furthermore, ATEPs are considered a way to attract “highly qualified” professionals from fields other than education:

Policymakers have long relied on alternative certification programs to help ease teacher shortages. More recently, (ATEPs) have been advanced as a way to enhance the teaching profession by offering a different type of preparation and attracting a different type of prospective teacher. Proponents say (ATEPs) provide an opportunity to recruit otherwise qualified candidates who cannot or will not enter the profession through the traditional route. In this spirit, (ATEPs) are seen as an alternative to traditional teacher education programs, which have often been criticized as being ineffectual. (Roach & Cohen, 2002, p. 3)

The certification of teachers remains a complex, if not convoluted, endeavor. Each state determines the processes by which an individual enters the classroom, and these processes vary widely from state to state. Further, procedures vary within states from subject to subject. For instance, Florida has an astonishing 410 academic and vocational areas of certification (Feistritzer, 1993). Though ATEPs are certainly not a panacea for all of education's ills, they do provide much-needed options for administrators struggling to staff classrooms with "highly qualified" teachers.

The Significance of Rural Education

Perhaps nowhere in our nation are schools viewed with such import as they are in the small towns and rural communities that dot our vast landscape. In rural and small-town America, schools are not merely buildings. They are the soul of the town, the very heart of the community.

Rural communities and their schools are closely linked in ways that urban and suburban schools cannot be. The local school system is one of the largest employers in a small community; it may even be one of the largest landholders in a small town. Through its payroll, schedule, politics, and students, the school system affects virtually every family in the community, regardless of whether they have children attending school. (Howley & Eckman, 1997, p. 4)

In rural communities, schools assume a number of varied functions. "In addition to providing for a basic education, they serve as social and cultural centers. They are places for sports, theater, music, and other civic activities" (Lyson, 2002, p. 1). Indeed, strong schools serve as the very symbols of a community's vibrancy, and small communities that have schools are considered more economically viable (Lyson, 2002). In essence, a healthy relationship between rural communities and their schools is crucial to both the effectiveness of the school and the quality of life of the community.

Nonetheless, declining populations, consolidation, and increasing state and federal regulation threaten the existence of rural schools and, by extension, rural communities (Howley & Eckman, 1997). In fact, Beeson & Strange (2003) report that 37.9% of rural schools have declining enrollments of at least 10%. School consolidation, spearheaded by state education officials, is often the solution *de rigueur*, and it has threatened rural communities for the past seventy years or more: "In 1930 there were more than 130,000 school districts in the United States.... By 2000, the number of school districts had dwindled to fewer than 15,000" (Lyson, 2002, p. 1).

Despite declining enrollments, a full 43% of the nation's public schools are located in rural communities or in small towns of fewer than 25,000 people (Beeson & Strange, 2003, p. 2). Moreover, rural schools should be a high priority in national education policy, as a significant fraction of the population lives and attends school in rural areas:

Nearly one in three of America's school-age children attend public schools in rural areas or small towns of fewer than 25,000, and more than one in six go to school in the very smallest communities, those with populations under 2,500. These children, their schools and their communities matter, and they deserve more consideration than they get in the national debate over education policy. (Beeson & Strange, 2003, p. 1)

The significance of rural schools is also reflected in these data:

- 31% of public school students attend rural or small town schools
- 21% of public school students live and attend school in communities of 2500 or less (Beeson & Strange, 2003, p. 2)

Though individuals in rural communities cannot alter the national changes that put their towns at risk, they can become empowered to pursue "educational, civic, and economic activities that enhance their sustainability and growth" (Collins, 2001, p. 15). It follows, then, that rural schools "as central institutions in rural life, must assume a role in community economic development" (Collins, 2001, p. 16).

But for schools to spearhead economic growth within rural communities, they must first be healthy themselves. As was mentioned previously, the main problem facing rural school districts is attracting and keeping high quality teachers (AASA, 1999). Rural districts frequently recruit educators from outside their communities, and these teachers, though well intended, often leave after a year or two: "The principal reason teachers leave rural areas is isolation—social, cultural, and professional" (Collins, 1999, p. 1). Another chief reason educators leave rural areas is financial. In general, rural teacher salaries are lower than urban and suburban salaries (Collins, 1999). This pattern means that new teachers are likely to go to areas with higher pay, and that some teachers who start out in rural areas may not be as likely to stay. Increased compensation might go a long way toward ameliorating rural teacher shortages.

Indeed, monetary incentives may be needed to overcome the perceived disadvantages of working in rural areas, namely isolation and remoteness (Jimerson, 2003), and some states are taking action by offering loan forgiveness and tuition assistance as inducements to teach:

A \$20,000 signing bonus in Massachusetts. A home mortgage with no down payment in New York. Forgiveness of student loans in Arizona, Connecticut, Florida, Kentucky, Minnesota, and Pennsylvania. Financial incentives are being parceled out like crayons as school systems across the United States face the need to find 2.2 million new teachers over the course of the next several years.

(Coeyman, 2001, ¶ 1-2)

Of course, proffering financial incentives to attract talented individuals into teaching may not be a feasible option for rural administrators who already face shrinking budgets and declining enrollments.

Montana's Rural Schools

Rural schools across the country are in need of attention and assistance, but rural and small-town schools in Montana are among the most severely challenged. Out of the 50 US states, Montana ranks high on many measures pertaining to rural population and rural schools. It is

- 2nd in percentage of schools in rural areas
- 6th in percentage of all students attending small rural schools
- 7th in percentage of state's population that is rural
- 12th in terms of overall need for attention to rural education

According to the NCES, 61,034 students attended rural schools in Montana in 2000, 39.5% of the total (2000b).

Further, Montana, like many other states, struggles to recruit and retain teachers and administrators in its rural communities (Nielson, 2002). In fact, it is anticipated that administrative positions will become increasingly difficult to fill in Montana as almost half of the principals and superintendents surveyed in 2001-2002 reported an intention to retire within the next five years (Nielson, 2002).

Montana's teacher shortage has three distinct aspects.

- Teaching positions for specific subject areas are often hard to fill. Currently, music, foreign language, special education, and math teachers are in great demand, making secondary educators a prime concern.
- Some districts struggle with many job openings across the board. In many districts, a significant number of secondary educators are eligible for retirement. The rate at which these teachers choose to retire will impact teacher shortages.
- Statewide, many districts struggle with an inability to attract and retain teachers. Though Montana's teacher education programs produce enough graduates to meet the state's annual need for new teachers, only 29% remain in the state, while others seek employment elsewhere. Low salaries and the isolation and remoteness of rural communities are the two primary reasons cited. (Nielson, 2002, p. 5)

Not all news is bleak. Those who choose to teach in Montana's smallest rural districts (those with 40 or fewer students) cite enjoyment of a rural lifestyle and good relationships with students as the most important factors influencing their decisions to remain in their positions. Such quality-of-life factors may be important in spearheading recruitment efforts in rural areas. However, low salaries remain an issue of concern (Davis, 2002). Though Montana's rural school districts offer small class sizes and beautiful scenery, salaries and benefits are woefully inadequate (Morton, 1999). As one University of Montana education graduate sardonically noted, "You can't eat scenery."

Proposed Solutions to Rural Teacher Shortage

Thus far, states have not been especially successful in developing programs specifically designed to address problems of rural teacher recruitment and retention. In the absence of such programs, communities must try to develop local solutions. Individuals in rural areas and in small towns can encourage local youth to consider teaching as a profession, create support programs to help new teachers feel comfortable in their communities, and actively promote the advantages of rural or small town teaching (Collins, 1999).

Furthermore, the way teachers are educated for service in rural schools can be expanded. For example, increased salaries and incentives for teachers would go a long way toward staving off shortages (Jimerson, 2003; Hirsch, 2001). Teacher education programs can target paraeducators already serving within rural schools and provide them with onsite or distance learning opportunities for full certification (Hirsch, 2001). Finally, ATEPs such as the NPTT attract mid-career professionals into the classroom (Hirsch, 2001; Feistritzer, 1998; Chaddock, 1999).

Teacher cadets. Early outreach programs such as the Teacher Cadet Program of the South Carolina Center for Educator Recruitment, Retention, and Advancement (CERRA) may serve to help grow teachers from within high-needs communities (Collins, 1999; Hirsch, 2001). According to CERRA, the teacher cadet program attracts more than 2,000 academically gifted high-school junior and seniors annually (CERRA, 2004, ¶ 5). The program is designed to attract talented young people to the teaching profession while

they are still in high school. Students who are accepted into the program study pedagogy and participate in teaching and mentoring activities with younger students. The innovative program has experienced widespread support from traditional teacher preparation programs in the state's institutes of higher learning: "Twenty-three of South Carolina's 30 colleges and universities with teacher education programs provide support to the Teacher Cadet sites. Over two-thirds of the college partners grant college credit for satisfactory completion of the course" (CERRA, 2004, ¶ 8).

Summary

In summation, recent changes in ESEA—collectively known as No Child Left Behind—are designed to help students achieve academic success by ensuring that pupils in poor schools have access to highly qualified teachers and rigorous curricula. The law emphasizes community involvement, local control, high standards, and accountability for results. As noted, students in poor districts are much more likely than their wealthy peers to sit in the classrooms of secondary teachers who are not certified, who do not have academic majors—or even minors—in the fields they are teaching, or who are otherwise under-qualified. This is particularly important in Montana because, according to Koball and Douglas-Hall, in the West, "children in rural areas are more likely to live in low income families" (2003, p. 1).

How the recent changes to ESEA will impact rural schools remains to be seen. With the literature reviewed as a foundation, the researcher made the deliberate decision to investigate one aspect of the new law—highly qualified teachers—and its possible

implications for rural communities in Montana. The next chapter outlines the design and methodology used to research how one community may be impacted by the “highly qualified” provision of NCLB.

Chapter III

Design and Methodology

Qualitative Methodology

By tradition, rural communities value education highly. Learning about a single rural Montana community's perspectives on the issues surrounding highly qualified secondary teachers and the chronic secondary teacher shortage can best be learned through an in-depth phenomenological study.

Qualitative research involves the collection and processing of multiple realities. In other words, no two individuals perceive any situation or issue in the same way. Each brings his or her own perceptions, biases, hopes, fears, and beliefs to any given phenomenon. Qualitative researchers seek to immerse themselves in these messy details of lived experiences in order to find common themes, categories, and characterizations. In essence, qualitative researchers seek a path to the very heart of human experiences; they seek to "generate knowledge through crafting portrayals" (Piantanida & Garman, 1999, p. 131).

Induction is at the center of qualitative inquiry. Researchers create new understandings in a

movement from the particular to the general, from the concrete to the abstract, from the idiosyncratic to the universal—in short, from the situational to the conceptual. ...Inquiry centers on a phenomenon as it manifests within a specific context. Whereas the context is particular, concrete, situational, and idiosyncratic,

a phenomenon of sufficient educational significance bridges into the universal.

The movement from the situational to the conceptual is accomplished through the crafting of portrayals. (Piantanida & Garman, 1999, p. 133)

In other words, qualitative researchers strive to capture the essence, the fundamental nature, of the situation being studied. Their work arises from the premise that “the world is a research laboratory” (Berg, 2001, p. 17). In opening their eyes to the nuances around them, they collect and catalog details and descriptions in an attempt to devise a portrayal that allows readers to experience, vicariously, the phenomenon under consideration. “The vibrancy—the believability—of this core portrayal contributes to the verité of the dissertation” (Piantanida & Garman, 1999, p. 133).

According to Greene (1978), qualitative research may serve not only to gather data, but to empower individuals who might otherwise feel disconnected from existing power structures. As outlined in the literature review, members of rural communities often feel detached from the workings of the “experts” in state government, and of course education is currently a system managed by state governments. Consequently, rural individuals may suffer from feelings of powerlessness that result from the weight of bureaucracy, poverty, and ignorance about the systems that dominate their lives. Greene asserts that people can be empowered by an increased awareness that systems are not inevitable and fixed. The very *processes* of qualitative inquiry help people understand that they have the capacity and the competence to effect change in their social environment. In other words, to do qualitative research

in this fashion is to respond to actual problems and real interests, to the requirements of sense-making in a confusing world. It may also aid in the identification of lacks and insufficiencies in that world—and some conscious effort to repair those lacks, to choose what *ought* to be. (Green, 1978, p. 166)

The researcher agrees that educational processes have the potential to better society, especially when they focus on actual difficulties and authentic concerns. She supports Greene's assertion that the act of qualitative inquiry has the ability to empower respondents, and she welcomes such empowerment as a possible outcome of her research.

To repeat, education is inherently a human endeavor. As such, qualitative research methods seem most suitable as the means of reaching the heart of the problem of teacher shortage in rural Montana. It is recognized that, as Berg (2001) notes, "qualitative research methods and analytic strategies are not associated with high-tech society in the ways quantitative techniques may be" (p. 2). It is also recognized that there is a trend toward quantitative study in education as researchers strive to make findings "scientifically" based. Nevertheless, qualitative research is best suited for this study because it strives to reach the "essential nature of things.... Quality refers to the what, how, when, and where of a thing—its essence and ambiance" (Berg, p. 2). It is exactly the "what, how, when, and where" of rural teacher shortage that this study hopes to uncover.

Research Paradigm and Processes

The fundamental purpose of phenomenology is to illuminate and examine common ideas in human experiences. Phenomenological researchers seek “to portray the essence of *their* experience with an understanding of the phenomenon. ... Their understanding of the phenomenon, the way they have made sense of it, may have utility for others who are struggling with the phenomenon in similar contexts” (Piantanida & Garman, 1999, p. 145).

The researcher will therefore employ phenomenology as a research design. Widely used to study human experience, this approach is not intended to elucidate new theories or to develop new conclusions. Rather, researchers use phenomenology to reduce complex descriptions of human experience to expose common themes and thus generate new knowledge. Moustakas (1994) delineates four steps of phenomenological processes: epoche, reduction, imaginative variation, and synthesis:

1. Epoche: Putting aside any preconceptions, the researcher will visit a rural Montana community to solicit opinions and insights from community members without consideration of educational background or expertise in the field.
2. Reduction: The researcher will condense observations and interviews into language that provides thick description of the phenomenon.
3. Imaginative variation: The researcher will closely examine the description to identify possible meanings. She will describe the structural elements of

the phenomenon, the variation of possible meanings, and perspectives of the phenomenon from different points of view. In this way, the imagination—or creative reflection—is used to uncover the essential nature of the phenomenon. In other words, the process of imaginative variation is one that opens analysis to a creative interpretation. It results in a description of the *qualities* of the experience, qualities that move us from fact to essence.

4. Synthesis: The researcher will interpret observations and descriptions in order to capture, with words, the essence of the phenomenon. In this step, the researcher will integrate “the fundamental textural and structural descriptions into a unified statement of the essences of the experience of the phenomenon as a whole” (p. 100). Though synthesis results in an interpretation of the phenomenon, it is important to note that the “essences of any experience are never totally exhausted. The fundamental textural-structural synthesis represents the essences at a particular time and place from the vantage point of an individual researcher following an exhaustive imaginative and reflective study of the phenomenon” (p. 100). In synthesis, one moves toward “intersubjective knowing of things, people, and everyday experiences (p. 101).

Using this paradigm, the researcher will solicit opinions from members of a rural community regarding issues surrounding secondary teacher shortage in their local

schools. Insights will be gathered from a variety of stakeholders, without consideration of educational achievement or expertise. The researcher assumes that these stakeholders are capable of contributing valuable insights into issues regarding education and teacher shortage by sole virtue of their membership in the community. Opinions from a wide range of community members will be listened to without judgment; they will be reduced to thick description; they will be analyzed for imaginative variation; and they will be synthesized into a comprehensive statement of meaning.

Intentionality, Noema, and Noesis

Phenomenological research is, at times, an esoteric process. Moustakas (1994) explains:

There is general agreement that meaning is at the heart of perceiving, remembering, judging, feeling, and thinking; agreement too that, in perceiving, one is perceiving something (whether existing or not); one is remembering something, judging something, feeling something, thinking something, whether the something is real or not. (p. 68)

In other words, meaning, as sought after by the phenomenological researcher, may resist concrete definition in the physical world. Instead, meaning arises from the thought processes of human beings, from the *intentionality* of the mind to create meaning. Integral in intentionality are the notions of noema (the perceived meaning) and noesis (the *act* of thinking and reflecting). Ihde (1977) writes that “noema is that which is experienced, the what of experience, the object-correlate. Noesis is the way in which the

what is experienced, the experiencing or act of experiencing, the subject-correlate" (p. 43).

As it pertains to this study, the noema is understood to be secondary teacher shortage in relation to NCLB legislation; noesis is the perceptions and attitudes of the individuals within a rural Montana community. The act of interviewing provides the intentionality, the impetus for the construction of meaning.

Purpose and Goals

The ultimate aim of this research project is to uncover the attitudes and perceptions of rural community members toward the problems of teacher recruitment and retention. Again, the scope and scale of teacher shortages in rural Montana schools has been well established (Davis, 2002; Nielson, 2001), but a descriptive and explanatory picture of the problem as viewed by those who are faced with the challenge of coping with it on a day-to-day basis will serve to inform the educational community. In any case, it seems likely that these individuals can provide context and insight that may add to a better and more thorough understanding of this significant problem.

Broadly speaking, the researcher intends to create new knowledge that informs discussion about rural education and teacher shortage. As noted above, the researcher also seeks to empower informants:

From the phenomenological standpoint, liberating education initially results in the perception that the world of oppression is not a closed world from which one cannot escape; instead, oppression is a limiting situation that can be transformed.

This perception is tentative, however, because it must result in action that seeks to change existing conditions. The phenomenological import of this educational view resides in how we perceive conditions or in how conditions present themselves to consciousness.... Liberated perception does not accept the given as inevitable, but rather looks to *possibilities*, to a world to be born through *praxis* or purposeful action. (Ozmon & Craver, 1999, p. 262)

The researcher will therefore serve as a participant observer and interpretive inquirer:

At the heart of the inquiry is the researcher's capacity for encountering, listening, understanding, and thus 'experiencing' the phenomenon under investigation.

Rather than assuming the traditional stance of a detached and neutral observer, an interpretive inquirer, much like a tuning fork, resonates with exquisite sensitivity to the subtle vibrations of encountered experiences. (Piantanida & Garman, pp. 139-140)

Selection of Community

Secondary school administrators in all Montana districts with community populations fewer than 2,500 will be surveyed to determine the extent to which secondary teacher shortage exists and the extent to which changes in ESEA will impact teaching staff. One community in which secondary teacher shortage is a chronic problem and in which principals are able to identify potential teacher candidates from within their community will be selected. The researcher will select a community based on the

following criteria: secondary teacher shortage, potential teacher candidates within the community, and researcher perception of richness of data. (See Appendix A.)

Data Collection

The researcher will be in contact with the target community from November 15, 2003 until April 4, 2004. The researcher will solicit assistance from the secondary school principal in identifying teachers, school board members, parents, and others (e.g., ranchers, bankers, clergy, small business owners) in the community who might be willing to share their perspectives on the phenomenon under study. Each identified community member will be contacted and asked to voluntarily participate in a semi-standardized interview. (See Appendix B.) It is important to note that the interview questions will serve as a springboard to dialogue; they will not be used to provide quantifiable data. The researcher holds that meaningful interviews often resist pre-arranged questions. Indeed, Eisner (1991) suggests that “conducting a good interview is, in some ways, like participating in a good conversation: listening intently and asking questions that focus on concrete examples and feelings...” (p. 183). Each interviewee will be asked to identify another community member who might be willing to share her or his views, thus creating a snowball effect. When the researcher is confident that the questions have been answered, that warrants have been met, she will conclude data collection. After all, because “the purpose of interpretive inquiry is to portray a deeper understanding of the topic under study... the warrants serve to make the ‘portrayals’ ring true (Piantanida & Garman, 1999, p. 255). No minors will be permitted to participate in the study. The

names of participants and the community will be changed to ensure anonymity. Because Montana has more than 100 rural communities, the researcher is confident that the respondents—and the community itself—will be masked.

Instruments

Electronic survey of school principals. The researcher will utilize an electronic survey to determine the perspectives of rural school principals on the issues of teacher shortage and the potential pool of teacher candidates. The survey is constructed to elicit specific and precise information. (See Appendix A)

Semi-standardized interview questions. The researcher will utilize semi-standardized (Berg, 2001, p. 70) interview questions to determine the viewpoints, opinions, and attitudes of individuals in a rural community on the issues surrounding secondary teacher shortage. The interview questions are constructed to elicit personal insights, perceptions, and ideas. Some questions are open-ended; others are precise, but will be followed with probes. (See Appendix B.)

Data Analysis

The researcher will analyze survey responses, compose field notes, and code emerging themes (Berg, 2001; Moustakas, 1994). Specifically, the researcher will write a rich, thick description of the community's perspectives as they relate to teacher shortage and teacher development in secondary content areas based upon transcripts, arranging them into interpretive clusters (positive, negative, neutral) and then into themes ("highly qualified" teachers; attracting and retaining teachers; growing teachers from within the

community; significance of rural school to the community), synthesizing these into a thick description of the phenomenon. Findings will be interwoven with reflective analysis to create a well-crafted portrayal of the significant attributes of the experience.

Interpretive and narrative inquiry. As noted in the *Limitations and Assumptions* section of this dissertation, the subjective nature of interpretive inquiry may call into question qualitative research as a legitimate form of investigation. By definition, the researcher in a qualitative study *participates* in the experience being studied. Furthermore, she *interprets* the experience's essential qualities through the lens of her own knowledge and participation. Again, the researcher seeks not to quantify understanding; rather, she strives to craft a narrative portrayal of the "salient features of the phenomenon" in order to capture the very *essence* of the experience (Piantanida & Garman, 1999, p. 135). In other words, the qualitative researcher strives to create a vivid depiction

that allows others to experience vicariously the phenomenon and the context under study, and thereby come to understand the complexity of both. Because this portrayal initiates the knowledge-generating process, we see it as the centerpiece of a qualitative dissertation. In more empirical studies, portrayals might take the form of a data display, such as tables, charts, or graphics. In interpretive and critical studies, portrayals are more likely to take the form of text.... (Piantanida & Garman, 1999, p. 133)

By constructing a well crafted narrative, the researcher will explicate and reflect upon the phenomenon under study in an attempt to develop deeper—and broader—understandings. To craft a truthful portrayal, one that resounds with the voices of participants—as well as with her own voice—the researcher will attempt to paint a picture with words. She will create a narrative filled with rich and thick descriptions, a narrative based upon active (and interactive) listening, copious and detailed notes, and tape-recorded interviews. She will present the words of the community members so that they may speak for themselves, but she will also reflect upon the meanings of the words in order to identify key themes and to share her own struggles and interpretations:

It is not enough for qualitative researchers to call attention to the features embedded in the core portrayal and, in so many words, say, 'See this portrayal? It corresponds to the phenomenon I've been studying. See this phenomenon really does exist.' Rather, through the core portrayal, researchers make public their personal/private perspective of the phenomenon under study. Then, through the interpretive portrayal, they make public what they are thinking about the phenomenon as they have portrayed it. (Piantanida & Garman, 1999, pp. 135-136)

Therefore, the paper will be replete with *voice*: the objective voices of the community members and the reflective, interpretive, and analytical voice of the researcher. In essence,

at the heart of the inquiry is the researcher's capacity for encountering, listening, understanding, and thus 'experiencing' the phenomenon under investigation.

Rather than assuming the traditional stance of a detached and neutral observer, an interpretive inquirer, much like a tuning fork, resonates with exquisite sensitivity to the subtle vibrations of encountered experiences. (Piantanida & Garman, 1999, pp. 139-140)

Voice is a significant, nay critical, feature of qualitative dissertations. The presence of voice contributes to the authenticity of the research and to its overall strength:

A sense of vitality arises from the verisimilitude of the core portrayal. When this portrayal succeeds in creating a vicarious sense of the phenomenon and context of the study, readers often feel a sense of immediacy and identification with the people and events being described. So, the study comes alive for the reader.... In a well-conceived, well-written portrayal of the inquiry, this sense of aliveness often shines through in the story of the study. (Piantanida & Garman, 1999, p. 152)

Narrative and interpretive inquiry often results in research that has an aesthetic, if not artistic, quality. Piantanida and Garman (1999)

speculate that this quality arises, in part, when meaningful connections are made between the individual and the universal. This is an effect of good art and good inquiry. Furthermore, when the logic of justification is clearly laid out and the resulting portrayals support one another, the integrity of the study can embody a conceptual elegance. (p. 153)

It is the intention of the researcher to craft a narrative portrayal that truly encapsulates the phenomenon under study, that resonates with authentic voice, that moves the reader from situational to conceptual understanding, and that recreates the notion of *essence* with the vibrant brushstrokes of an artist.

Summary

The research processes outlined above provide the framework by which the researcher will examine the research questions, explore the complexities of the issue of teacher shortage in a rural Montana community, and provide additional data that will further inform the professional conversation, particularly in relation to NCLB and “highly qualified” educators.

Chapter IV

The Case of Tevis, Montana

This was a phenomenological study of how individuals in a rural Montana community perceive the issue of secondary teacher shortage. The purpose of this chapter is to share the findings of the study in an attempt to develop a better understanding of the issue from the perspectives of those most greatly affected. The account includes the words of participants, but all names and major identifying features of the community have been changed. Though it begins with a chronological account to generate the setting, the chapter is organized around the four overarching research questions:

1. What answers to the problem of teacher shortage in the secondary content areas might those from the many walks of life in a rural Montana community envisage?
2. Would changes in secondary certification requirements encourage more rural community members to consider teaching middle and/or high school as a career? If so, what changes would need to be made?
3. What role might Montana schools of education play in developing middle and high school teachers from within rural communities, especially in relation to recent changes in ESEA?
4. What importance do members of a rural Montana community attach to their local secondary school?

The chapter also re-examines the themes explored in the literature review:

1. Teachers of secondary content areas are to be “highly qualified” by the 2005-06 school year.
2. Attracting and retaining “highly qualified” teachers is a challenge for rural schools.
3. Rural education is significant in Montana, and rural communities rely heavily on local schools for social and civic reasons.

In this chapter, I engage in phenomenological reduction:

The task is that of describing in textural language just what one sees, not only in terms of the external object but also the internal act of consciousness, the experience as such, the rhythm and relationship between phenomenon and self.

(Moustakas, 1994, p. 90)

I also make use of imaginative variation to hunt for meaning and to categorize themes:

“The task of Imaginative Variation is to seek possible meanings through the utilization of imagination, varying the frames of reference, employing polarities and reversals, and approaching the phenomenon from divergent perspectives, different positions, roles, or functions” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 98).

The Setting

Montana is a state divided into two distinct halves by the Continental Divide. Western Montana is made up of mountainous terrain and twisting rivers. The rugged landscape and picturesque vistas beckon hikers, cyclists, campers, hunters, anglers, aging hippies, and those who never miss an issue of *Outside* magazine. Though not wealthy,

residents of western Montana live comfortably, and that comfort is reflected in the relative strength of the teaching force. Though some secondary schools suffer from shortage, the allure of the countryside and the area's proximity to attractions such as Glacier National Park, the Bob Marshall Wilderness Area, and trout-laden rivers draw applicants from throughout the region. Administrators report difficulty in locating teachers for hard-to-fill areas such as music and special education, but core content subjects are usually covered.

Eastern Montana is another story. The region epitomizes the Great Plains; it consists of vast expanses of open land suitable primarily for cattle ranching or sheep farming. Businesses are few and far between, and many can be seen from the exit ramps of I-94 or I-90. The area is dotted with small towns that sprung up along old river trade routes or rail lines. Many towns, outposts really, serve areas as large as 60 square miles or more.

One such Eastern Montana community is the small rural town of Tevis. According to 2000 Census (US Census Bureau, 2000) data, the town has a population of only 600 or so, and it is graying: The average age is 53. The town boasts fewer than 25 children under the age of five, a number sure to impact the future survival of the local K-12 school. The people are overwhelmingly white: 97.5% of the total population. Only 14.7% of residents have bachelor's degrees, and the median household income of \$25,294 is significantly lower than the national average of \$41,994. Close to 15% of the population did not finish ninth grade, and another 9% completed their freshman year but

did not graduate. These numbers are influenced by the presence of a Hutterite community on the outskirts of town. Usually, Hutterite children do not attend school past the eighth grade. Approximately 5% of the school's population of 93 is made up of Hutterites. The school is identified as a Title I school; close to 45% of students qualify for free or reduced lunch. The school employs 20 full-time teachers and eight part-time teachers.

The first building one sees upon entering town from the highway is the school. A large sign in front of the athletic field welcomes visitors to "Tiger Country." A smaller sign to the right lists the week's events in changeable letters: a teacher's workday, a parent-teacher night. The list concludes with the wish "Good Luck Lady Tigers." (I learn later that the girls' volleyball team is participating in a hotly contested regional tournament.) The school itself consists of three buildings: one upper school built in the 1970s, one smaller building for the middle grades, and a historic building constructed at the turn of the century; it houses the primary grades.

A drive down the town's main street and its few ancillary roads takes about four minutes—tops. Small houses, circa 1940, line the streets. On every other block or so stands a grand Victorian, a reminder of the town's more prosperous past as a trade stop along a major river. If you are hungry, you have a choice of two restaurants: One is a pleasant, airy café; the other is a smoke-filled bar that caters to locals and the occasional hunter. A third restaurant is boarded up, as is an obviously ill placed espresso bar. An undersized hospital serves the medical needs of the community, and a tiny public library serves its intellectual needs. A small, independent grocer sells canned goods and soda,

while residents can have game dressed at the butcher's across the street. A gift shop with Montana-made candles and soaps gratifies the town's birthday and anniversary needs, as well as the rare tourist driving America's byways. Four churches—Catholic, Presbyterian, Methodist, and Lutheran—serve up spiritual wisdom along with green-bean casserole at the weekly potluck. The county museum is closed for the winter, but visitors can call a number listed on a yellowing sheet of paper taped to the front window, and someone will drive over and unlock the door.

Lodgers have two options: a run-down, 1950s motel, complete with RV park, or a historic main street hotel from the 1920s. Needless to say, I choose the hotel.

"We're Not Rural"

Upon tottering up the ice-coated wooden steps, bags in hand, I can't help but notice that the screen door has seen better days. Indeed, the steps have seen better days. Still, both are freshly painted, and the cheery green color more than makes up for the broken wicker chair on the front porch. I open the door, step into the lobby, and a tiny gray cat, meowing loudly, trots up to greet me. She rubs at my ankles before jumping to the counter. Another cat, a plump, fluffy calico, is already on the counter, dozing. I fuss over the cats, then put down my bags and ring the bell.

An elderly but spry woman—probably in her mid-70s—saunters in from an adjoining kitchen. A bit hesitant, she asks, "May I help you?" I reply that I would like a room, and that I would be staying for several nights. She becomes quite animated, as if the request for a room was something quite out of the ordinary. (I learn later that most of

the rooms in the hotel are occupied by townspeople “down on their luck.”) She informs me that I can have the best room in the hotel (the one with its own bathroom), and that the building is a historic site. While I complete the registration card, the proprietor asks what brings me to Tevis. I say that I’m researching teacher shortage in rural schools. Her brow furrows. “We don’t have any rural schools in Tevis,” she says. Now my brow furrows, and I stammer out, “Umm... the school here....” The innkeeper smiles, but she still looks confused. “But we’re not rural,” she says. “We’re town.”

I immediately recognize my blunder and try to correct. “I mean rural and small-town schools,” I say. “Tevis is a small town, and I’m here to talk to people about the school.” I struggle to bracket my prejudice, to remain true to the spirit of *epoche*, but I catch myself thinking, “How cute. She doesn’t even know Tevis is rural.” Internally, I acknowledge this as a major failing straight away. After all, I am here to understand her perceptions, not to judge them. It hasn’t been five minutes, and already I’m behaving like an outside “expert” who thinks she knows everything. I remind myself that this woman is knowledgeable because she lives here; she is invested in the town and in its school. Indeed, my sole reason for being in Tevis is to hear her voice, to listen to her opinions.

I try again: “Tell me, what do you think of the school here in Tevis?”

Her face lights up. “Oh, it’s a great school,” she says. “You know our girls are in the volleyball tournament.” (I discover later that the townsfolk regularly refer to the school and its students using words such as “our,” thus suggesting a direct, personal

connection between the community and its school.) I reply that I did not know about the volleyball team, so she expounds.

“Oh, yes,” she says with obvious pride. “We’re tops in all kinds of sports, and we’re tops in academics, too. Everyone talks about how good our school is.” She pauses. “You know, I used to be a teacher. Not here. I taught in a rural school, one up in the mountains. I had six children, all different ages. Now that was rural.” I agreed. (No wonder she didn’t consider Tevis School to be “rural.”) She talks about her experiences teaching in a mountain school for about six minutes or so, and then pauses. “I think you’ll find lots of people to talk to about the school,” she says. “You’ll need to talk to Dorothy, the woman who owns the café. Her grandchildren are in school. And don’t forget Lois at the beauty parlor. Actually, you can talk to anybody. Most of us have children who went there.”

“Did your children go to Tevis School?” I ask.

“Yes,” she nods. “Both my daughter and son. My daughter teaches school in North Dakota now, and my son lives in Missoula.”

“Would they consider moving back to Tevis?” I ask. (An exodus of young people often signals the beginning of the end for rural communities.)

“No, no. My daughter’s married, and she’s got a family that’s settled now in Dakota. And my son... well... he seems pretty happy in Missoula. But they’re both coming home for Thanksgiving. Are you going to be with your mother for Thanksgiving?”

I smile, touched that she's thinking of my mother. "No," I say sadly. "My parents live in Virginia, and I won't be able to make it home this year."

We chat about the holidays for five minutes or so—she is understandably excited that her children and their families are coming home—and then she hands me the room key. It's an old metal key. (No electronic key cards here.)

"Let me know if there's anything you need," she says.

I thank her and head up the stairs. My bags are heavy, so I tread the steps slowly, taking in the somewhat garish décor—an odd blend of Victorian romance and fifties kitsch. At the top of the stairs is the bathroom the other "guests" share. A large wooden sign over the door reads "TOILET." You can't miss it. A similar sign rests atop the next door, but it reads "SHOWER." I wonder whether people get the two rooms confused, and again I forcibly curb the internal voice that screams city-slicker prejudice.

I make my way to the room that will become my base of operations for the next several days. The room is quite nice, but it has no phone—a pay phone is in the lobby—so I can't access the Internet. The room has two twin beds, and the adjoining room consists of a dressing area with a sink, toilet facilities, and a shower. I smile to myself as I realize that this really is the best room in the hotel—even though I can't brush my teeth without gagging on the sulfur-rich water.

From the Voices Themes Arise

Over the next several days I talk with many of the community's inhabitants, and I stay in telephone contact with many of them for the subsequent three months. I revisit the

community for an additional four days, until warrants are met. Themes arise from the residents' stories, from their conversations. The themes are guided by my research questions and the literature, but they spring into being on their own. More important, I believe that the interviewees gain power in the process; they truly discover their *own* voices as they learn that their opinions are sought after and that their community is valued.

The Importance of a Rural School

As noted in the literature review, individuals in rural communities value their school for much more than academics. The school takes on increased significance, as it is the social and civic center of a town. I heard this theme repeated time and again from the people of Tevis.

"Oh, there's a real connection with the community," the school's sole administrator, Jake Henderson, says. Henderson serves as elementary principal, secondary principal, and district superintendent. He also drives the school bus when the regular driver is ill. Last summer, he installed the new playground equipment. Today he drove a frightened kitten back to its owner on the outskirts of town. Cold, it had climbed under the engine of the school bus, and it had somehow managed to hold on to the block for the entire 30-minute drive into town.

Tall, athletic, and gregarious, Henderson exudes confidence and pride when he talks. It is apparent that he has a personal connection to the school—this clearly isn't just a job—and he throws himself into our conversation.

“Most everybody went here,” he explains, “or their kids go here, or their parents went here. If you live in this town, this is *your* school.”

He and I walk through the halls of the upper school, and I notice that many of the classrooms are empty... and the rooms that do house students are far from full. One classroom consists of a teacher and three teenagers. My stomach tells me that this school is in the beginning of its death throes. A larger district is just 20 miles away, and I think to myself that the state will suggest consolidation before too long. I can't help but consider it ironic that a school with declining enrollment should also be experiencing teacher shortage. This is certain to be a lethal combination in the eyes of state policy makers.

I ask Henderson whether he thinks consolidation might threaten his school.

“No, no.... I don't think so,” he says, shaking his head. “The nearest district is about 20 miles away, and that would be too long a commute for the kids here in Tevis, especially in winter.”

He may be right, but the image of empty classroom after empty classroom is haunting, and it suggests to me that others might consider putting kids on a bus for a 20-mile commute to be a most cost-effective solution to two problems: teacher shortage and declining enrollment. (In fact, rural children in consolidated districts throughout the country face one-way bus rides up to two hours in length (Zars, 1998).)

As we amble down the main hall, Henderson points out the graduation pictures along the walls. I gaze into the hopeful eyes of students from the Class of '48, a large class with about 40 students (a far cry from this year's graduating class of 12).

"This guy runs the auto-body shop," he says, moving from frame to frame. "And this woman's grandkids go here." We make our way to the Class of '57. The number of graduates is starting to dwindle; this photo contains the pictures of 26 students. "This lady is married to the guy who operates the farmer's collective, and this man manages the funeral home." We continue down the hall while Henderson elaborates on the connections between the community and the school. As he talks, I hear children laughing and enjoying their recess time in the snow. I stop and look out the window. Young Hutterite girls in scarves and long skirts squeal and clap their hands as they try to avoid the ball in dodge ball. Other children—of a variety of ages—are playing what seems to be some form of tag. The playground is alive as children swing madly or wait their turn up the ladder for the slide. I think to myself that it's nice that the children are actually having recess... a pleasant change from the adult-organized "activities" that pass for playtime on so many schoolyards.

I turn to Henderson and smile.

"It's nice here," I say. "I've read that rural communities are really tied to the school. Do you think that's the case here?"

Henderson returns my smile and nods his head.

“Look, I’m not from Tevis, but I grew up in a town that’s really similar,” he says. “The school *is* the community. People go to different churches, but in a town like this one, everyone goes to the same school. It’s like the *identity* of the town. Our girls’ volleyball team is playing in the regional tournament, and everyone is really tied up in it. Our gym is full on Saturday nights; coming to games is what people around here do.

“And it’s not just sports,” he continues. “People seem to have some really strong opinions on what goes on at the school. We have a weekly paper here in town, and sometimes it seems like most of the local news has to do with our school.”

Of course, Henderson’s words echo what I had read repeatedly in the literature. The community *is* the school. I am eager to jump ahead in the conversation, and I ask him what schools of education might do to encourage more young people to enter the teaching profession.

“You know, that’s a good question,” he said, pausing to consider. “I’d have to say anything that indicates a *presence* in the community would be a good thing....” He pauses again. “Again, sports are really important here. If they could underwrite, like, the team uniforms or something.... You know, something that said, ‘Sponsored by the UM School of Education.’ Or ads in the school paper or yearbook. Like, ‘Make a difference. Teach.’ Stuff like that. Around here everybody talks about ranching or working in town. It’s almost like teaching isn’t on their radar.”

"Is Laura Playing?"

The café sits right off the main road and is visible from the interstate exit. Bright and cheery, the small seating area holds only six tables; each is covered with a vinyl red-and-white checked tablecloth.

The walls of the café are decorated with old black and white photographs of the area and items from the county museum. On one wall is a crudely painted scene of Indian Wars-era soldiers burying their dead. According to an index card adhered to the wall with Scotch tape, the title of the painting is "After the Battle."

I hurriedly finish a plate of bacon and eggs and ask Dorothy, the owner of the café, if she would mind talking with me about the local school. I explain that I'm a doctoral student researching rural schools, and that I'm trying to talk with as many townspeople as possible. Dorothy walks over and pulls up a chair. She and I chat as I sip cup after cup of steaming hot coffee, a welcome respite from the bitter cold of an eastern Montana winter morning.

Dorothy echoes Henderson's sentiments—and the literature—when she speaks of the importance of the school to the community

"Oh yeah, people are real tight with that school," she says. "I went there, my daughter went there, and her son is in the third grade there now. It's a real good school. I suppose you've heard about our girls' volleyball team?" She reaches over to the counter, picks up a tournament schedule and places on the table in front of me. "If we win tonight, we move on the semifinals."

Two elderly ladies at a neighboring table interject.

"Is Laura playing?" one asks.

"I don't know," Dorothy replies. "She still had a fever as of last night, so I don't know." She looks back to me and explains. "Laura is the star player, but she's got the flu. Her mom is the waitress here, and she's been sick herself." She calls to the waitress in the kitchen. "Leanne?" she cries. "Leanne, is Laura gonna play tonight?" The waitress emerges, wiping her hands on a towel.

Dorothy, Leanne, and the two elderly ladies discuss whether Laura will be well enough to play. I, meanwhile, wonder about the bacon and eggs I've just ingested. I'm not particularly comfortable knowing that the waitress has just gotten over the flu. I wait several minutes until the women finish discussing volleyball—a clear display of the community's personal involvement with the school and its functions—and Dorothy turns back to me.

"What would happen to Tevis if the school closed?" I ask.

"What do you mean?" She looks a bit panicked, a look that perhaps says more about her relationship to the school than do her words.

"Oh, I don't mean that the school is going to close," I say quickly. "I'm just wondering about how important the school is to the community."

"It's real important," she said, her eyes indicating that I was asking a truly stupid question.

"I Used To Be On That Board"

Jimmy is an outgoing middle-aged man with thinning hair and a full beard. He is significantly overweight, and most of the extra pounds are situated around his middle in a stereotypical beer belly. He runs the local hobby shop, a store that features model trains and model rockets and model cars. In a nod to potential female customers, there's one small section devoted to dollhouses.

Like many of the individuals in Tevis, Jimmy is genial and responsive, and he is more than willing to chat with me. And, like many of the townspeople, he has a personal connection to the school.

"I graduated in 1977," he says, smiling widely. "And my son graduated in 1995. He went off to that community college and studied auto mechanics, and now he works over at the garage. It's a good job, and he seems real happy." (The community college to which Jimmy refers is 40 miles away in a neighboring town.)

"I used to be real involved in the school," he continues. "But not so much now. I used to be on that board, that school board. I served almost ten years, until my boy graduated. It's a real good school. You know, they're always asking for more money and stuff, but I guess that's to be expected. 'Course, this is a real rural area, and we just don't have that much money. Seems the folks who live outside of town, the ranchers and all, they're always complaining that they pull more than their fair share since they pay more property taxes. But then, their kids go here too, don't they?" Jimmy laughs. "It always comes down to money, don't it?"

I laugh and agree. As noted in the literature review, in Montana's rural schools, money is often the make-or-break factor, especially in relation to teacher salaries (Nielson, 2002).

"But it's a real good school," he continues. "My son didn't have any trouble over at the community college. And the kids who go off to Montana State, they don't have any trouble either. They're real prepared."

We chat a bit more about the school as I wander around the store. Jimmy relates how he and his wife often attend athletic events at the school, and he regales me with anecdotes about one of the boys on the basketball team. After about 10 minutes, I thank Jimmy again, and make my way toward the door. He calls to me: "Hey, have you heard about our girls' volleyball team?" He hands me a tournament schedule.

"I'd Like Nothing More Than To Stay, But..."

Brenda is Tevis School's only student teacher; she is working on a K-12 certification in physical education. A student at a liberal arts college in North Dakota, Brenda is in her sixth year of studies. She returned home to student teach in Tevis for one reason: She can't afford to student teach unless she lives with her parents.

The connection to Tevis and to the school is apparent in Brenda's words and body language. She likes it here, and she says so repeatedly. But there is a certain nervousness, an apprehension, in her demeanor. Her eyes dart back and forth and her fingers tap the desk, and I think to myself that she is probably one of the many student teachers who has too much to do and not enough time in which to do it. I'm sure that chatting with me on

her planning period wasn't something she had allotted time for. I resolve to be direct—and hence brief.

"I like it here, I really do," Brenda says in slow, deliberate speech. "I really love this school. I had a great time as a student here, and I'd like to get a job here. They've hired me to do some coaching, you know, to help me out while I'm student teaching, and I think that's really terrific. It's the kind of thing that's just really nice, the kind of thing that makes this school really... special.... I'd like nothing better than to stay, but I've got so much in loans... over \$70,000, and the school here starts at \$20." (Of course, she means the district has a beginning salary of \$20,000 annually.)

"Nevada starts at like \$40. I know, I know..." she said, shaking her head and rolling her eyes. "It costs more to live there, but still.... \$40! It's taking me six years to get this degree, and now I *seriously* need to make some money. It's such a terrific school and a terrific town, and I know all the people here. I like small towns... I like the lifestyle, you know? But who can afford to live here? I know you can buy a house here really cheap, but I've got so much *debt*."

She looks at me plaintively, and I nod my head.

"I know," I say.

Brenda's words reiterate—yet again—the need for higher salaries and other financial incentives to encourage young teachers to choose careers in rural schools (Jimerson, 2003; Hirsch, 2001). As delineated in the literature review, the majority of

Montana's new teachers leave the state for greener—or at least better paying—pastures (Nielson, 2001).

The Role of Schools of Education

Many of the townspeople of Tevis do not shrink from expressing their points of view about what university schools of education could do to help their local school. A few, Jake Henderson and school board members mainly, are familiar with No Child Left Behind.

Back in his cluttered office, Henderson shares his anxiety about the new federal regulations. He leans back in his chair and sighs.

“One thing that really concerns me,” he says, haltingly, “is that if they... the government... take like our social studies people... our science people... they don't have specialized endorsements in *each* of the areas.” He pauses, collecting his thoughts. “It won't be possible for us to hire people to do that. The bigger schools can, I think. They'll be able to hire a physics teacher, you know. We don't have that luxury around here. We have broad-field science, broad-field social studies.”

Henderson explains that if the federal government insists that each teacher have a degree in specific content areas, then his school will have no choice but to turn more and more to technology for answers. Currently Tevis School participates in an interactive television (ITV) consortium that links rural schools in eastern Montana together so that a single educator can reach students in remote locations. At Tevis, for example, a single student takes second-year Spanish with a teacher from a neighboring school through ITV.

Henderson points to the television monitor in his office. "This will be our salvation," he says. "We won't be able to afford, say, a physics teacher. We just updated our system, and it's pretty good. We have Spanish and an art class that uses the ITV. We used to have a speech class, and it's been very helpful out here. Technology is a big part of the solution."

When I say that I would like to see the ITV studio, Henderson bolts from his chair. He is obviously proud of the technology, and he seems truly excited to share it with me.

Henderson walks me to the ITV studio; it is indeed an impressive collection of technology. On a large monitor at the front of the class is the smiling face of a middle-aged woman, the Spanish teacher from a neighboring district. Sitting alone at the tables, a young girl stares rather blindly at the screen. She glances up when Henderson and I enter the room, and she squirms a bit self-consciously in her chair. A large microphone in a rather unwieldy stand is placed directly in front of the student, should she choose to ask a question or want to otherwise participate in class. At the rear of the room, a paraeducator surfs the Internet. (Henderson explains that a "live" adult has to be present in the room during interactive teaching sessions.) The Spanish teacher asks, "What would that word be? What would it be?" Silence. "Anyone? You remember!" More silence. "It's *sentarse*, 'to sit.'" The lone student writes the word into her notebook, and the Spanish teacher moves on. "How about 'to stand'? Anyone?" Silence.

Henderson and I make our way from the interactive TV studio. He says that schools of education could make better use of ITV to deliver university courses to remote areas such as Tevis.

“We have good schools here, and we have a good academic program. But if the feds tell us we need to do more, then we’re going to need some help. Anything to ease the burden of trying to find qualified teachers would be helpful. Right now our science teacher is retired, and we keep him on part time. He’s been with us 30 years. When he retires, it’s going to be tougher than heck to find a science teacher. Same thing with our shop program. He’s a retired half-time person, and I don’t know what we’re going to do when he retires for good.”

I ask whether people in the community might have the knowledge and skills—but not the certification—to teach secondary subjects in Tevis School.

“Perhaps, perhaps,” he says, pondering. “A good example might be the library. We’ve got a library in town, and we’ve got the school library. It doesn’t really make sense for us to have two different libraries and two different librarians. But the public librarian isn’t a certified *school* librarian. She’s got the expertise; she knows what she’s doing. She could even teach some English classes. If there were an easy way for her to pick up certification as a school librarian and an English teacher, that would help us tremendously.”

“You know, one of our special-education aides is a lady from here in town, and she’s working on her special-education certification through Billings. There’s a lot of

online instruction, but she also has to take some classes over the summer. She should be finished next year, which is great because, you know, special education is always needed, and it looks like our regular special-ed teacher is going to retire pretty soon. In fact, about 20% of our staff will probably retire in the next five years or so. If the universities could beam in some classes so folks didn't have to go all the way into Billings, that would really be terrific."

Henderson escorts me downstairs to the classroom of the sole social studies teacher for grades 6-12. Should NCLB be interpreted to preclude broad-field social studies as a certification area, this teacher, Frank Brooks, would have to earn certification in government, economics, and history, the three courses he currently teaches. Henderson leaves us alone, and I thank Brooks for agreeing to chat with me. "Yeah, no problem," he mumbles as his eyes scan the floor. He seems a bit reserved; perhaps he dislikes having his planning period interrupted. I put on my widest smile and assure him that I won't take more than ten minutes.

"Believe me, I know how precious time is," I say. Establishing a time limit seems to brighten Brooks's mood somewhat, and he looks up, making eye contact.

"Tell me about the school here," I say quickly, not wanting to lose the opportunity. "What is it that makes Tevis School special?"

He pauses, thinking. "I guess it's... well... the kids are good kids. They're not... y'know... geniuses... but they work hard...." His voice trails off.

Ah, I think to myself. This is going to be like pulling teeth. I decide on a different approach.

"I'm researching how secondary teachers in rural schools might be impacted by No Child Left Behind," I explain. "There is still some disagreement about what the law actually requires, but it may mean that secondary teachers will need to be fully certified in every subject area they teach."

This gets his attention, and he glances up from the spot on the floor that had previously held his undivided attention. "What do you mean?"

"For example," I explain. "Someone who teaches broad-field science, say, would have to be certified in physics, biology, and chemistry. Some interpretations of No Child Left Behind seem to suggest that teachers would have to have content-area degrees in each area."

"So *I* would need a degree in econ and government?" he asks.

"Perhaps," I reply. "Again, there really is widespread disagreement about what the law actually entails."

Brooks shakes his head. "Unbelievable," he says. "I've been teaching here for six years now...." Again, his voice trails off, and his eyes return to the spot on the floor.

"Tell me," I say. "What could universities do to help make the requirement easier for you?"

He stares at the floor. "I don't know."

"Could they offer online classes? Would that be helpful?" I ask, though I know the question is leading.

"I don't know. I don't like computers. I'm one of those people who would rather be in a class with people. But... I don't know.... I don't want to do that either." Again, Brooks shakes his head. His body language suggests the helplessness outlined by Greene (1978), helplessness that results from viewing oneself as outside power structures.

I smile and stand up, gathering my things.

"That's really all I have," I say, extending my hand. "Thanks so much."

"No problem," he mumbles, shaking my hand. As I leave the room, Brooks swivels in his chair, focusing his attention back to the stack of papers on his desk.

I wander the halls a bit before I make my way back to the main office. Murals painted by art students cover the walls: A ferocious-looking tiger chews on a shredded basketball; a peace sign covers an abstract representation of earth; birds fly over a field of flowers.... In many ways Tevis School is like so many others. It houses the hopes of young people; it provides fellowship, and I'm sure, heartache. Signs advertising the date class pictures will be taken dot the walls, as do notices for a Girl Scout meeting and a winter drama production. Of course, posters with good wishes for the girls' volleyball team are everywhere.

When I enter the main office, Theresa, the secretary, smiles widely.

"Are you having fun?" she asks.

"Absolutely," I say, returning her smile. The main office is quiet, so I ask, "Would you mind chatting with me a bit?"

"Oh, you don't want to talk to me!" she says, dismissing the idea with a wave of her hand. "I don't know anything." (Again, Greene's assertions are confirmed.)

"I *do* want to talk with you," I say. "I'm trying to gather many different opinions from a variety of people."

"I don't know anything about teaching..." she says, but her eyes betray a willingness—maybe even an eagerness—to talk.

"That's okay," I assure her. "Have you worked here long?"

"Twelve years," she laughs. "Time flies."

"Doesn't it, though?" I take out my pad and jot down Theresa's name, title, and the number 12. My writing seems to make her self-conscious, and she giggles nervously.

"Oh, really," she says. "I really don't know anything."

I think to myself how *embedded* a sense of incapacity is among those who view themselves as separate from power structures. I put my pen down and concentrate on conversing with Theresa, on listening to her voice and attending to her nonverbal communication, as Eisner (1991) suggests.

"C'mon," I say. "Twelve years is a long time. I bet you know this school inside and out!"

"Well, that's true," she says, again laughing nervously. "There's not much that happens that I don't know about."

"Tell me," I say. "What changes have you seen?"

"Oh, you know," she replies. "The school seems to keep getting smaller, but the kids are terrific, and the parents are terrific. Actually, the school seems to be really doing well now since Mr. Henderson came on board. He's a great leader."

Theresa confirms what I had suspected. Henderson provides a central focus around which the school may rally. Perhaps that is the essence of a good school leader.

"The teachers and parents really like him," she continues, "and the kids like him too. He's not too important to help out around the school. He put in the playground last summer all by himself. He was out there each day in that heat. And he's not too proud to drive the school bus if the regular driver can't do it. He seems to be everywhere doing everything. Heck, he even answers the phones when I run to the bathroom!

"Y'know, a good principal makes all the difference. The one we had before..." she shakes her head. "That wasn't a good experience at all, but you don't want to hear about that...."

"What wasn't good about it?" I ask, because it seems obvious she wants to tell me.

"Oh, you know.... Small towns...." she laughs, but her voice trails off.

"What about small towns?"

"There's a lot of good about small towns, but it can be bad too. There's no privacy; everybody knows everything about everybody. He didn't seem to realize that.... But Mr. Henderson, he's good. Everybody seems to like him. 'Course, there are some on

the board who are always complaining about money, but it takes money to run a school....”

A teenage boy walks in, and Theresa excuses herself to help him. He turns in a permission slip and a \$5 bill, obviously a fee for an upcoming trip. Theresa puts the slip and the money in a drawer and turns to me.

“Have you talked to Lisa, our aide, yet?”

“No, but she’s on my list!” I reply.

“This is her son, Brad. He’s in tenth grade.”

I stand up and extend my hand, as I always do with adolescents. He shakes my hand and mutters a weak “Hey. His eyes never leave the floor as he turns and exits the office.

“He’s a real good kid,” Theresa says, making her way back to her desk. “Plays on the football team.”

“Sports seem to be real popular here,” I say.

“Oh, yeah,” she says. “Everybody loves sports. It’s nice because it gives people something to do. Everybody gets real wrapped up in sports. Our girls’ volleyball team is playing the regionals, and people are just so excited. I bet I had ten phone calls today... people wanting to know about the tournament.”

“Are other activities as popular? I noticed a sign for a play coming up.”

“Oh, not really. The parents and friends of the kids who are in the play will go, but that’s about it.”

I explain that I'm interested in finding out what role schools of education might play in rural education, especially in the development of teachers from within communities. She seems hesitant to reply, so I take the lead:

"For example, Mr. Henderson said we could offer classes on the ITV. Do you think that might help?"

"Oh, sure," she says, brightening. "That thing is really something. Our kids use it all the time. We've got a girl now taking a Spanish class on it."

I nod. "What about you? You're a professional. Have you ever considered moving into teaching?"

"Me?" she laughs. "No, no. I see plenty of kids in this job, and that's plenty for me!"

"But say, for example, that the school needed a business teacher. You obviously know how to use the computer. Would you be willing to teach an intro class or two for the high schoolers?"

"Oh... if I had to... I could help the kids with their keyboarding, I suppose," she says, thinking. "But I couldn't really be a *teacher*." The quickness with which she dismisses her own knowledge and skills fascinates me. It's as if "teacher" is a title reserved for "others." I'm not willing to let up.

"But say someone in the ed school came down here and worked with you for a couple of weeks, here at your job, with *your* computer.... Gave you some background knowledge? Would you be willing to give it a shot?"

She stares into space, thinking.

"I don't know," she says, but she seems to be thinking hard. If Greene is right, if conversing with the powerless about *possibilities* helps them to view themselves as more competent, then I think I may be doing just that.

"I Wouldn't Be a Teacher. No Way!"

My second evening in Tevis I decide to try the *other* restaurant in town, the one that advertises "Homade (sic) Soup." One of my personal rules is to never enter eating establishments that have no windows. I break that rule when I swing open the door to Rob Murphy's, bar and restaurant. My eyes take a second or two to adjust to the dim light and clouds of smoke. I immediately realize that the woman who is tending bar is the only other female in the room. About six or eight men in cowboy hats and Carhartt overalls are lined up at the bar, and they each seem to be staring directly at me as I stand, fixed, in the doorway.

"Uh," I stammer. "Do you serve dinner?"

"Next room," the bartender, a young blonde, says. I look to my right and see a dark room with a few tables. "Switch is on your left."

I look along the left wall until I see the light switch. I flip the lever and fluorescent bulbs flicker on. The room is dirty, but I feel it would be better to just sit down than to leave, so I plop myself into the nearest chair. I hear the men in the bar laughing and talking loudly. The jukebox is playing—twangy country, of course—so I

can't hear exactly what is being said, but it seems as if everyone is having a *very* good time.

Five minutes or so elapse, and I start to think about leaving. But I'm hungry, and the café doesn't serve dinner, so it's either this or one of the Slim-Fast bars I have back in my suitcase. I stay put.

Within another few minutes, the young blonde walks quickly in with a typed menu, a knife, fork, and a paper napkin. She sets everything in front of me.

"Drink?" she asks.

"What kind of beer do you have on tap?"

"Bud, Bud Light, Michelob."

Ah, the holy trinity of blue-collar bars, I think to myself. I order a Bud Light.

Glancing over the menu, I decide on the steak. Somehow, *cod* just doesn't seem like something one should order in eastern Montana.

The bartender/waitress brings me my glass of beer and takes my order. I can see she is in a hurry to get back to the bar, but I stop her. She looks very young, but since she's tending bar I assume that she's at least 18, so I ask her a few questions.

"Excuse me," I say. "I'm in town from the University of Montana doing some research on rural schools. Are you from Tevis? Did you go to school here?"

"Yes," she says, looking rather annoyed.

"I know you're busy, but have you ever thought about being a teacher?"

She actually steps back, as if the words themselves had struck her.

"I wouldn't be a teacher. No way! I couldn't finish school fast enough. Last thing in the world I would do is go *back*."

"So you don't go to games on the weekends or anything?"

"No way!" she says, spinning on her heels. "I hated school."

I try to engage her in conversation when she brings me my food, but to no avail. It seems the *last* thing she wants to do is talk to me about school. Of course, I want to know *why* she is so negative, *why* her experience was so bad, but she won't talk.

I sit alone in the restaurant, staring at my gray steak. It defines the word *tough*, and every mouthful contains gristle. I choke down less than half of it, leave cash on the table for the check and a tip, and hastily make my way back to my room. I eat my Slim-Fast bar.

"The School? It's Okay, I Guess"

Not everyone in Tevis is responsive to questions about the school or its role in the community; some residents even seem downright negative. In a subsequent visit to Tevis, I visit several businesses along the town's main street.

My first stop is the town's hardware store. It's a Saturday, and four or five men wander about, looking at various items on the shelves. A tall man with a graying beard stands behind the counter. He's chatting about landscaping with a young man in torn jeans and a flannel shirt. I walk up and down the three aisles, glancing over the merchandise: motor oil, bird feeders, gardening implements, tools.... When the young man in the flannel shirt leaves the counter, I make my way to the front.

"Excuse me..." I say to the gentleman behind the counter.

"Yes, ma'am," he says. "What can I help you with?"

"Well, actually...." Suddenly I feel a bit self-conscious. I should have at least picked up something to *buy*. "Um.... I'm here from Missoula doing some research on small-town schools, and I was wondering if I could ask you a few questions."

"You want to ask *me* some questions?" he says, laughing.

"Sure," I say with my widest grin. "I'm trying to talk to lots of different people. It'll only take a minute or two."

The other men in the store stare toward the front, trying to determine what's going on.

The man behind the counter—his name is Ken—thinks for a minute or two.

"Well, I suppose it'll be all right," he says. "But I don't know much about the school. 'Course I went there, but that was some time ago."

"Oh, that's okay," I say. "Tell me, what do you think are the characteristics of a good high-school teacher?"

"A good high-school teacher," he repeats, thinking. "Well, I can tell you about the best teacher *I* had in high school."

"That would be fine," I say.

"Well, it was the woodshop teacher. He was funny as hell. He was always crackin' with the jokes. I always looked forward to his class."

"Did you learn anything about wood?" I ask.

“Oh, sure,” he says. “I don’t mean we didn’t do our work. In fact, I still do some woodwork on the side, like as a hobby, y’know? We learned how to do the work, but he made it fun. We had fun, but we didn’t screw around or nothin’. He always said that screwing around was the surest way to lose a finger. ‘Course, we was all boys, and sometimes he’d say screwin’ around was the surest way to lose your... well... never mind,” he laughs, his eyes scanning the floor, suddenly embarrassed.

“Oh, that’s okay,” I say, and I join in his laughter. “Please go on. Tell me more about the school.”

“The school? It’s okay, I guess. ‘Course, I got nothing to compare it to....” He trails off.

“So a good high-school teacher should have a sense of humor,” I say. “Is there anything else you would say makes a good teacher? Especially here in Tevis? Any special characteristics someone *here* would need?”

He pauses. “Well, you know, this is a small town,” he says. “I suppose someone who wants to teach here would need to know something about the people here. You know, what the parents do... stuff like that.”

“Have *you* ever considered teaching school?”

“Lord, no!” he says rather loudly. “I wouldn’t have the patience for it. Those kids....” He shakes his head.

“But what about something like woodwork? You said you still like to do that as a hobby. Say the school needed a part-time high-school woodshop teacher. Would you consider it?”

Again, he pauses. “Y’know, that might be kinda fun.”

One of the men in the store makes his way to the front counter with his purchases.

“You? A teacher?” he asks, obviously ribbing Ken. “Let me know when so I can pull my kid out!”

We all laugh, but the man’s joke shuts Ken down cold. After the man pays for his items and leaves, I try to pick up where we left off, but Ken is done.

“That’s it for me,” he says, decisively. “Can’t tell you no more than that.”

I smile and assure him he’s been very helpful. He nods, and I leave the store. I can’t help but think that Ken might have the talents and skills a high school might need, but he obviously doesn’t view *himself* that way. It is an essential idea I am beginning to see over and over: Teacher as other.

“I Couldn’t Do It”

My next stop is an insurance agency. It’s a small, storefront business, and a solitary man sits at a desk toward the back of the single room. The worn avocado-colored carpet has obviously been in place since the Fifties; the most threadbare spots are covered with silver duct tape.

“Hi, there!” the man shouts with all the enthusiasm one would expect from an insurance agent. “What can I do for you?”

I feel a bit guilty, since I'm not in the market for insurance, but I swallow the guilt and introduce myself.

"You're doing research on the school?" he asks. "My wife is the fifth grade teacher. I don't know how she does it. I sure couldn't do it."

"Oh, but you run a *business*," I say. "Surely that's a lot harder."

"No, I work for myself. I like that. I listen to some of the stories my wife brings home.... No, I couldn't do it."

"C'mon," I say. "If the school needed someone to teach, say, an elective in business, I bet you could do it...."

The agent, Ed, shakes his head. "No..." he says. "I did good just finishing high school. I know my job, and I'm happy. No, I wouldn't want to teach...."

"Fair enough," I say, smiling. "Can you tell me what makes a *good* high-school teacher? In your opinion?"

"Well, let's see.... I think my wife's a good teacher, and she's got loads of patience. I think that's important whatever the grade. I think it's important that a teacher be fair. I remember teachers that seemed to just have it out for you. Nothing you would do would be good enough. That's not good, that's not good at all...."

"No, that's not good," I agree. "Tell me, what do you think makes for a good high-school teacher here in Tevis? In other words, do you think a teacher here in Tevis needs to have any *special* characteristics?"

“Well,” he says, pausing to think. “If you want to teach here in Tevis, you’d better be happy living in a small town. If you like going to malls and movies and stuff, then this isn’t the place for you. ‘Course *I* like it, but I grew up here. I know everybody, and everybody knows me. My dad ran this business, and now I do. My wife, she grew up over in Morton, so it’s a real similar situation.”

I nod. “Do you know of anyone here in town that you think would make a good high school teacher, only they’re not certified?”

“Hmm...” he says. “No, I can’t say that I do. Most of my friends have jobs they like, or they’re running farms, or they’re raising their own kids.... No, I can’t think of anyone.”

I thank Ed, shake his hand, and make my way to the bank across the street. I have to hurry because it’s Saturday, and the bank closes early.

“Maybe One Class”

It’s 11:50 a.m., and the bank closes in ten minutes. I know this is going to be rushed, but I decide to take a chance. I dart across the street and in the front door. A loud “ding-dong” chime lets the lone person in the bank know of my arrival. It seems the tellers—if there are any—have already gone home. There is one man behind the counter, and he looks at me a bit quizzically. He wears his glasses low on his nose, and he tilts his head down to look at me over their rims.

“Can I help you?” The question lacks sincerity. This is a man who’s ready to go home.

“Yes,” I say. “I know you’re closing, but I’m a university researcher doing some study on the local school. Do you mind if I ask you a question or two?”

“Research?” he asks, as if pondering the meaning of the word.

“Yes,” I reply. “I promise I’ll be brief....”

“Um, okay...” he says. His reluctance is palpable. He hasn’t even moved his head.

Since time is short, I decide to jump in with both feet.

“Lots of rural schools are facing teacher shortage,” I explain. “If the high school here in Tevis needed someone to teach, say, finance for one class period, would you consider doing it?”

The man stares at me.

“You know, hypothetically,” I say. “I don’t think they *really* need a finance teacher.” Suddenly I worry that he thinks I’m a complete crackpot or, worse yet, someone out to rob the bank.

Without moving, he says, “Maybe one class.”

It’s obvious to me that he’s not going to elaborate, so I say “Thank you” with all the bounce my voice can muster, and I head out the door.

Once outside, I consider the man’s answer: “Maybe one class.” Perhaps it is because he’s a professional—a banker—but this person seems to have no problem viewing himself as a possible teacher. It may be that the way in which a person views

him or her *self* is the primary factor schools of education should consider when contemplating growing teachers from within communities.

I glance down the street. The signs would be the same in any small town: American Legion; Post Office; Shoe and Tack Repair; Robertson and Sons Mortuary. I can't help but think that this town will not exist in 20 years. The country is changing; the world is changing. Suddenly I feel wistful. I think that I may be looking at a slice of American that will soon be no more.

I make my way to the rental car to write my notes.

"It's a Black Hole"

I decide to attend Sunday services at the town's Lutheran church, the biggest of the churches in town. The relative large size of the congregation underscores the town's German-Scandinavian heritage. Many houses bear decorative signs on their front doors that read *Willkommen* or *Välkommen*. (In a neighboring town I visited a pizza parlor that featured sauerkraut as a topping.)

I get to the church early and loiter around a bit self-consciously in the front. I want to talk to people, but I don't want to intrude on their Sunday worship. I decide to wait until the service is over in the hopes that a coffee hour will follow.

It's an absolutely gorgeous day, and everyone seems to be enjoying the warmth of the sunshine. It's Palm Sunday, and the women are wearing their spring finery—pink seems to be the color of choice. Small groups of people make small talk in front of the

church; children run around and around in circles. Spring comes late to eastern Montana, and this warm day is one of the area's first. Trees haven't even started to bud yet.

People look at me a bit quizzically as I make my way up the steps—I am, after all, an outsider—but this is Sunday, and this is church, so everyone smiles. The usher hands me a palm cross, and I pin it to my shirt before walking quickly to the first pew on my right and sitting down. I glance through the service brochure, and then look carefully at the church. It is stark in a typically German-Lutheran way. The altar consists of a simple wooden cross and the communion implements covered in Lenten cloths. A small vase of spring flowers sits on the floor. An organ, relatively small but powerful, is to the left of the altar.

The opening procession is lovely. The eight-member choir walks slowly down the aisle as the congregation of 50 or so stands and sings the Palm Sunday standard *All Glory, Laud, and Honor*. The pastor follows the choir and takes his seat at the front. For the next 70 minutes I enjoy the comfort of the sit-stand-kneel-repeat ritual common to Lutheran churches. I make a point of forcibly removing the issue of rural schools from my mind. There will be time for that later. After all, the brochure does indeed list a coffee-hour in the social hall immediately following the service: "Visitors Welcome."

At the coffee-hour, several people walk up to me to introduce themselves. The first is a kindly older woman named Lucy.

"Welcome," she says, extending her hand.

I quickly move my Styrofoam cup of rather weak coffee to my left hand and grasp hers in my right.

"Thank you so much," I reply. "It was a *lovely* service."

"Are you somebody's relative?" she asks.

"No, no," I say, shaking my head. "I'm here in town from the University of Montana doing some research on small-town schools."

"Oh, really?" she says, feigning interest.

"Yes," I say quickly, not wanting to waste this chance to talk with someone.

"What do you think of the school here... the high school especially?"

"Dear, my children graduated a long time ago," she said. "I don't know anything about the school...."

I want to ask her if she could recommend someone else in the room who might be willing to chat with me, but it just doesn't seem like the right thing to do at a church social hour. I decide to make small talk ("Could you ask for a nicer day?") for the next minute or two, and then Lucy shakes my hand again and excuses herself.

The next woman who introduces herself to me is thin and tall. Her short brown hair is streaked with gray. Like most of the other women here, she's dressed in springtime pink. Her lipstick matches her blouse *exactly*.

"Hi there," she says warmly, taking my hand with both of hers. "My name is Gracie. Welcome to our church. Did you just move here?"

I explain my reason for being in Tevis.

“Oh, I don’t know much about the school,” Gracie says, “But you should chat with my husband.”

She waves her hand to a short man, presumably her husband. Balding, the man has an all-too-typical beer gut. “Mark!” she says. “C’mere a minute!”

The man saunters over, requisite Styrofoam cup in hand.

“Mark, this young lady... what’s your name, dear?”

I pronounce my first name several times—and spell it too—just for good measure.

“This young lady is doing some kind of research on the school...”

Before she could finish, the man groans.

I laugh. “Now that’s a telling sound,” I say.

“That school...” he says. “Seems like they always need more money for *computers* or *equipment* or *whatever*.” Each word is weighted with sarcasm. “You’d think we were running Harvard over there.” He laughs, but there is an edge beneath it.

“Now, Mark...” Gracie says.

“No, it’s okay,” I interject. “I’d like to know more.”

“Look,” Mark says, pointing his index finger for emphasis. “If I ran my farm the way they run that school, I’d be out of business. Which one of them politicians said that education is like a black hole? It just sucks money up. No matter how much you throw into it, it just disappears. It’s like a big ol’ hungry mouth, wanting more and more. Every time ya turn around they’re raising money for something or ‘nother. And the taxes I pay! My kids finished years ago!

"They've got those three buildings, and they don't need but the one. Close the others down. Simple as that. Save the lights and power. Don't take a rocket scientist to figure it out! But *noooo*.... Can't do that. That'd make *sense!*" He takes a breath and shakes his head.

Gracie laughs. "I knew you'd like talking to my husband," she says.

I share in her laughter and nod my head.

"You're right!" I say.

"Look," Mark continues, again pointing his index finger. "I'm not saying they do a bad job at teaching or nothing, 'cause I just don't really know about that. I'm just saying that it ought not take as much money as it does...."

Gracie takes her husband's arm. "All right, that's enough now." She turns to me. "Did that help you at all?"

I smile. "Yes," I reply. "Thank you both so much."

Gracie and Mark wander off, and I stand by myself for just a minute or two, processing my thoughts, before the pastor, Alan Thompspon, walks up to greet me. Like so many other people in Tevis, he seems to be in his late 50s or early 60s.

"Welcome, welcome," he says, shaking my hand and smiling widely. "You visiting us today?"

"Yes, yes I am," I say. "It was a lovely service. Thank you so much."

"Thank *you*," he replies.

I move quickly into the reason for my visit.

"Do you think the high school is important in this community?" I ask pointedly.

In true politic fashion, he declines to answer.

"Oh, I really couldn't say," he replies. "Welcome to our town. Glad you made it to church." With that, he turns and makes his way over to an elderly couple seated in two folding chairs along the wall.

I take a few minutes to finish my coffee. I nod at people who nod at me, and I smile at those who smile. I toss my coffee cup in the trash and make my way to the rental car I have parked on the street behind the church. Quickly, I jot everything down into my notebook.

Changes to Certification Requirements, ATEPs, and Other Possible Solutions

Dorothy, the café owner, agrees with Henderson that technology may be a viable option for developing teachers from *within* Tevis. "I'm not interested in being a teacher, no sir," she laughs. "I've raised my kids, and my grandson is enough, thank you. But I do know some folks here in town who would make really good teachers, but they're not going to spend their time driving back and forth. It's not bad now, but you know in the wintertime it gets pretty rough." Abruptly, she asks, "Don't they have classes on the Internet now?"

I tell her that indeed, online courses exist.

"Well then, there you go," she says. "They just got all those new computers over at the school. Can't folks go over there to take the classes?"

I tell her that I'm not sure what the school's policy on the public's use of their computers is.

"Well they sure cost enough," Dorothy says. "I can't see why we can't use them."

Lisa, the special-education aide who is working on her certification through a special program run through Billings, says she likes the combination of online classes and summer residential instruction.

"You know, it's hard on my family," she says. "But it's only for five weeks in the summer. I like getting to know the other people in the program. We get to be real good friends in those five weeks, 'cause it's really tough."

Still, if classes were available solely online, Lisa admits that she probably would have pursued her certification sooner.

"I had to wait until my kids were old enough," she says. "My husband takes care of them during those five weeks. 'Course, I come home on weekends, and you'd be surprised how much laundry piles up over the week." She laughs, but then she sighs, deeply. "It's not easy, you know. It's gotta be something you really, really want." She pauses. "Yeah," she says, sighing again. "I think all online would have been better."

I ask Henderson what he thinks about ATEPs.

"I'd certainly look into them," he replies. "My math teacher is a retired Marine officer, and he's terrific. I know the Troops to Teachers program has a really good record. You know, I'm just interested in finding good people. One thing I've always liked about the values of small-town education..." he pauses. "When our graduates come back, they

say, 'I can go to Seattle, and when I mention I'm from Montana, I can get a job like that.'" He snaps his fingers. "It's because of the work ethic and because of the good education they receive from Montana. You can't measure that. You can't assess that. It's not in a report that you send to Washington. Getting caught up in all those numbers takes away from that."

Henderson continues, "I'm just interested in finding good people. You know I go to these job fairs, and you see these Alaska booths and these Nevada booths, and there's no way we can compete with \$10,000 signing bonuses and moving expenses. Again, we have to rely on people who have ties here. I think OPI is moving toward offering one-week classes in the summers to get certified teachers their endorsements in a number of areas, and I'm really interested in that."

When asked how universities can help, Henderson says, "I'd say more of this," and he points to the ITV. "If we can cut down on the amount of time you have to go... to campus.... If we can have more of this," and again he points to the ITV, "then we can connect into the university system right from here. You know, people can go over to the community college and get their associate's degree. It would be nice if they could just come over here to finish their BA. You know, we're just talking about a handful of people, but even that would help. Several years ago MSU ran some business management classes over the ITV, and several people took advantage of that. And the Internet is getting better."

I admit I'm impressed with Henderson. He seems to be a natural leader, and he seems to juggle a variety of responsibilities with aplomb. One thing he said sticks with me: "If the feds tell us we need to do more, then we're going to need some help." I think he may be speaking for rural administrators throughout Montana. Furthermore, I think that schools of education may be in a singular position to help. As Henderson said, beaming classes via ITV might be a good start. Offering site-based weeklong intensive classes in the summers might be another. Partnering with two-year schools throughout the state might be still another.

Bottom line: If rural schools are expected to staff every classroom with a "highly qualified" teacher by the 2005-06 school year, they are going to need help doing it.

"Whoever Thought That Up Didn't Know Much about Small Towns"

Loretta, a school board member with a young son in first grade, says that the state could ease certification requirements without sacrificing teacher quality, especially if the school were empowered to "think outside the box" to envision new ways of growing teachers. Loretta runs an eclectic shop in a mobile-home trailer on the outskirts of town, a shop that sells knick-knacks, greeting cards, jewelry, satellite TV dishes, and café lattes. She and I sit down over a cinnamon cappuccino and discuss Tevis School.

"I got involved with the school board because there were some things that I would observe at the meetings that would make me just shake my head," she explains. "Some of it was money issues, where line items were questionable.... There were just things that were going on that I just couldn't believe. I wanted to get first-hand knowledge and that's

really hard to do unless you're involved. I started working with the Montana School Board Association, and now things are much better. You know, I'm one of those people who thinks if I'm going to complain about something, then I'm going to do something about it."

In regards to NCLB, Loretta is quite vocal.

"Whoever thought that up didn't know much about small towns," she says. "They didn't take into consideration how this one glove won't fit everywhere. As far as how it's impacting Tevis School.... We haven't gotten to the end of it yet, so it's too early, really, to tell. In one way we were fortunate...with the paraprofessionals. When they changed the law saying that you had to have a degree, that had to have hurt some schools because we rely, of course, on just what we have here. These are small towns, you know? Everybody's already got a job or they're doing something.... People with degrees are doing something other than being an aide.... It's just issue after issue. You know, small towns just don't get a lot of applicants."

Loretta stops for a minute, thinking. "We could probably do a better job of working to keep our young people here if we just put our minds to it. Our high school graduates are really top-notch, but they go off to college, and they don't come back."

Sipping my cappuccino, I think that Loretta is very bright, but she seems discouraged. She talks about how her first-grade son brings home discipline report after discipline report. I feel that she *wants* to support the school—she's on the board, after all—but she isn't impressed with her son's teacher, and that is coloring her experience.

"Yes," she says. "We could probably do more to keep our young people here."

Of course, Brenda, the student teacher, has returned to Tevis, but again, she probably won't stay. She reiterates, "The community here is great, but I really need to make money. It takes so much to become a teacher. By the time I'm done, I'll have spent six years in school. And I have mixed feelings about the student teaching. On the one hand, it's good experience, but sometimes I think I don't get rewarded enough." She is quick to qualify her response. "My cooperating teacher is really terrific and really supportive, but you know, it just takes so much.... I could probably have squeezed in the student teaching in half the time. Now I'm used to it, I feel comfortable... it's all just repetitive."

She pauses. "There are great people in small communities. Until you live here, you just don't know. I don't know if you can really *tell* that concept to anybody. Until you experience it.... It's different."

When asked why she decided to be a teacher, she laughs. "I always enjoyed school, I actually started coaching when I was young, and I liked that feeling of actually teaching someone to do something. But you know," she sighs again, "it's been so hard."

"It's a School Like Any Other"

On one day in Tevis, I decide to stop into the beauty parlor for a manicure. Actually, that was a pretense to talk to Lois, the owner. Several people had told me, "You *have* to talk to Lois." So... here I am.

I immediately learn why so many townsfolk have pointed me in this direction. The beauty parlor is abuzz with activity. Two ladies are sitting under dryers—I had thought those old upright dryers had gone the way of the T-Rex. Another woman is getting her hair foiled, and another is getting her hair trimmed while her young daughter spins around and around in one of the salon chairs. The bell rings as I enter the door. Most of the women in the salon go on about their business, chatting or thumbing through magazines, but a trim, attractive, middle-aged woman doing the foiling shouts over to me: “You need something?”

I don’t want to shout back, so I quickly make my way to where she’s standing, even though I feel like I’m intruding on the woman with her hair half covered in foil.

“Uh, yeah.... Are you Lois?”

“Sure am! You?”

“Umm, I’m doing some research on the school here in town... and I was hoping I could get a manicure....”

Before I can finish, Lois cuts in. “Sure. Have a seat over there and look at the colors.” She points to the nail station and the 20 bottles or so of polish. “I’ll be with you in about 10 minutes.”

I dutifully sit down at the nail station and study the colors, most of which are variations of pink and none of which would be featured in this month’s issue of *In Style*. I decide on one rather unremarkable shade, and then sit quietly to listen to the conversations around me.

The girls' volleyball team had lost in the semifinals, and the women in the salon were still talking about it.

"If only Laura had been able to get to the ball..."

"You know, I think that one girl is too old to play..."

"I really wish they had pulled it out. It's her senior year, you know..."

I smile to myself. The people's reaction to a girls' sports team speaks volumes about the town's relationship with its school. As I read in the literature, in rural areas, the school *is* the heart and soul of the community. The many people I chatted with... and would chat with in the months to come... reaffirmed it.

Lois strolls over and plops down in the seat in front of me, jolting me from my thoughts. She takes my right hand in hers.

"You *do* need a manicure don't you? Look at these cuticles!" Suddenly I'm embarrassed, and I stammer, "I've been staying at the hotel... and the air here is so dry...."

Lois again cuts across me. "You got that right. We'll get you fixed up."

She grabs a bottle of lotion and starts rubbing gobs of the fragrant goo into my hands. It feels *fabulous*.

Lois must notice the look on my face because she says, "Everyone needs a manicure now and then." I agree. I am tempted to close my eyes and just forget everything having to do with rural schools, No Child Left Behind, teacher shortage, and

this dissertation. But so many people have said that I *must* talk with Lois. I force myself into full consciousness.

“Umm... I’m doing some research on rural schools....”

“Oh,” she says. “Are you the one? I’ve heard about you. Have you had a nice visit?”

“Yes,” I reply. “This is such a nice town.” And I mean it. Tevis *is* a nice town. The people are, for the most part, friendly and helpful, and the school and its staff are impressive.

“Yes,” she smiles. “It is, isn’t it? I’ve lived here all my life. I can’t imagine living anyplace else.”

“What do you think of the school?”

“Oh, it’s a school like any other, I suppose. It has its good points and bad points.”

“How do you mean?”

“When I went there, which wasn’t *that* long ago, mind you,” she laughs, “when I went there, we had over 150 kids in the high school. Now there’s what, 60? They sure don’t need all three of those buildings. I know the one is a historic site, but c’mon! It costs money to operate all those buildings. You want to keep the historic one? Fine. Close down one of the others. ‘Course they won’t do that ‘cause of the computers. You can’t have all those wires in that old building.... And they should combine some of those classes. Do you really need a teacher for every subject when you’ve only got four or five kids? Just doesn’t make much sense to me. ‘Course, the kids are terrific, and they say the

teachers are really good. I don't know, 'cause my kids graduated about ten years ago. Their teachers were fine, but most of them have retired, and I don't know any of these new teachers. They're not from here, but I think that new second grade teacher is engaged to Mr. Baldwin's son from over in Morton."

Lois pauses to dry my hands. She stretches over to a nearby shelf and reaches for a buffer board. She takes my left hand and begins buffing each nail.

"I tell you, if we keep losing kids, we're not going to need all those teachers and all that computer stuff. If we end up with 20 or so kids...." She laughs, but her laugh betrays a certain unease.

"Look, the best teachers I had and the best teachers my kids had were people from right here in Tevis. We knew them and they knew us. If there was a church social, they were there. If we went to a ball game, they were there. My mother could call my teachers anytime, day or night. These new teachers... I just don't know. And you know some kids take classes on the TV! What kind of lesson is that? It's not like they don't watch enough TV. How involved can the teacher be? They're not even in the same room!"

We sit quietly for a moment.

"Did you decide on a color, honey?"

"Sure." I point to the bottle of nondescript pink.

"Oh, that's a very popular color. Good choice."

I'm sure she'd have said the same words no matter what color I had opted for. It's been about 30 minutes, and the woman getting her hair foiled is about ready to be

shampooed. Lois slaps the color on my nails with enviable precision. She positions my cotton-candy colored nails under the dryer.

“Any other questions for me?”

“Uh... no. Not right now. If I think of some later, can I call you?”

“Of course. Pick up one my cards by the register. You let your nails sit under that dryer now for about five minutes. You can pay Sherry when you’re done.”

She turned and headed back to the woman with her hair in foils.

“Let’s get you shampooed, okay?”

Teacher Cadets

In subsequent months, I call Lois and many of the other townspeople to discuss issues further and to ask for clarification. Repeatedly, they thank me for taking the time to chat with them about their school. Greene is right, of course. Qualitative research *does* empower interviewees. In fact, many people with whom I speak tell me that they are going to look into ways to help the school; many speak of pursuing volunteer efforts. Even if they are just *saying* it, I am heartened to know that the school is at least at the forefront of their minds—for a little while, at least.

In follow-up phone calls, I am particularly interested in whether residents have thought of other ways to help young people become teachers and stay in—or return to—Tevis. I ask them whether a model based on South Carolina’s Teacher Cadets, a program in which high school students earn college credits in education while they

mentor younger children (Center for Educator Recruitment, Retention, and Advancement, 2004) might work in Tevis.

Henderson, in particular, seems intrigued by the idea of cadets.

“Y’know, no matter what we do to help will be positive,” he said. “If kids can get some college credits while they’re in school... that helps a lot because you know our people don’t make much money. And if they find out they like working with younger kids, well... that’s a good thing, too. Hey, can you send me a link on that program in South Carolina?”

Dorothy, the café owner, also seems positive about the idea of cadets, and she echoes Henderson when she says that *anything* universities could do to help students obtain higher education without burying themselves in mountains of debt would help.

“They get college credit for a class taught in high school?” she asks. “Well, yeah, that’s good. And it helps them decide whether or not teaching is for them. If they can help the younger kids, you know, learn to read or do their math, then they know they can be teachers. Maybe working with the younger kids would make some of those girls decide to not have babies so soon too,” she said, laughing.

Jimmy, the hobby shop owner, agrees that the issue of money is the one issue that *must* be addressed in any discussion of young people and education. When I ask him about a teacher cadet program, he says, “Why would that just be for teachers? Why couldn’t someone like my son get college credit for work they did in high school? He went over to the community college to learn auto mechanics, and they taught him exactly

what he learned here in shop, only he had to pay for it, so I guess that means it's worth more."

I ask him whether high-school students in town would be willing to work harder in high school if it meant they could obtain dual-enrollment credit at the community college.

"Absolutely!" he replies. "Many of them are bored in school... I know my son was.... but if they knew they were getting college credit, well then, that just might mean something to them. Not everyone would do it, but I think a fair number would. Look, parents in this town aren't wealthy, and MSU costs money. If they could start college with a year or two of credits under their belts, well, maybe more would go and maybe more would finish."

Show Me the Money

In terms of enticing young people to return to Tevis, the townspeople with whom I conduct follow-up interviews are unanimous: Something must be done about the financial burden new teachers shoulder, or rural schools will die. When I mention loan forgiveness, respondents reply positively.

"Why *wouldn't* they come back for several years if they knew they could get their loans paid off?" Lois asks. "Look at Brenda. She's doing her student teaching here so she can live at home. If a kid can come back, live at home, make money *and* get their loans paid off," she laughs. "That's a no-brainer."

Lisa, the special-ed aide working on certification, agrees. "Look, I'm going to stay here. I love this town, and this is where I want my children to grow up. If I could get some help from the state to pay back some of these loans, that would be terrific. You know I'm not making much as an aide, and I won't make much as a teacher, but that's okay because I want to live here. But the loan is tough. I hate having that hanging over my head. And why can't I get credit for what I've already done? I'm sitting in classes with kids who've never worked with children a day in their lives, and I'm in this school every day it's open. I mean, I'm working here, but I'm still supposed to log in observation hours. What's that about?"

Henderson concurs that loan forgiveness is a top priority, but he repeats what he said earlier about the need for technological innovations. "Look, we've got the ITV," he says. "If a college wants to, it can offer any class it wants. We might only have one or two people sign up, but if there were one or two people in every little town in Montana, well.... that would be a rich class. And so many different people would make the class interesting."

During a subsequent visit to Tevis, I stop back in to the beauty parlor to chat with Lois. I ask her to elaborate on her assertion that perhaps the school doesn't need a teacher for every subject.

"When I was here before, you asked, 'Do we really need a teacher for every subject when you've only got four or five kids?' But what if the subject is, say, calculus? Doesn't that teacher need to be a specialist?"

Lois thinks for a minute or two.

“Look, it comes down to this. Do the kids need calculus or do they need a high-school diploma? Fact is, they’re running three buildings over there, and they don’t need but one. If it’s that important they take certain classes, they’re going to have to combine schools with Morton. I don’t see how we can keep paying all these teachers. I know everyone always says how teachers don’t make any money, but they’re making more money than most of the folks around here.” She shakes her head. “Just doesn’t make any sense, those three buildings.”

Perhaps it’s because I’m not paying for a manicure, but Lois doesn’t seem nearly as willing to discuss Tevis School as she was during my last visit. There is no one else in the salon, but she gets up and makes her way back to her station. It’s obvious our brief discussion is over. I smile, thank her, and leave.

It appears the presence of *three* school buildings is a point of contention for several people in town. I don’t know whether it would really be more cost effective to close one or two of the buildings, or if it would just seem to be so. Regardless, keeping the three buildings open appears wasteful in the eyes of some of the residents.

Summary

The researcher conversed with 32 residents of Tevis and its surrounding areas, and she related interviews with 18 in this dissertation. For the most part, the people of this small town in Montana value their local school, and they value their teachers. They worry about the graying of their town, and they are concerned that their school might

close because of falling enrollments. Nonetheless, they remain optimistic about the future. These and other findings are delineated and analyzed in the last chapter.

Chapter V

Synthesis and Implications

I learned much from my contact with the people of Tevis. Not only were my research questions answered, the themes I had gleaned from the literature were affirmed, and I developed a new understanding—and appreciation—of how individuals in a small Montana town view their school, their teachers, and education as a system.

The final step in phenomenological research is synthesis, “the intuitive integration of the fundamental textural and structural descriptions into a unified statement of the essences of the experience of the phenomenon as a whole” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 100). Before I attempt to synthesize the phenomenon of teacher shortage in rural Montana, let me say that I hope I have successfully crafted a portrayal, to use the words of Piantanida & Garman (1999), a portrayal that clearly and accurately synthesizes the attitudes and perspectives of the individuals I encountered. The portrayal I hope I have created is one of cautious promise, of tempered optimism. Though steps are underway to develop “highly qualified” teachers for rural communities, rural communities themselves may be in danger of extinction.

The Identity of a Community Is Intricately Connected To Its School

As Howley & Eckman (1997) assert, small communities rely upon their schools for social cohesion. The residents of Tevis, Montana, have a strong bond with their K-12 school. Education is indeed an important part of the daily life of this small town, and the

school represents the very *self* of the community. To hear person after person refer to the athletes as “our,” or to the teachers as “we,” underscores a sense of kinship between the town and the school. Individuals in Tevis are proud of their school, of its history, and of its record. They have faith in education and in the ability of the local school to prepare their children for the future. They have strong opinions, and they enjoy the opportunity to share them. They typify small-town kindness, generosity, and warmth of spirit. Indeed, the townsfolk of Tevis are almost stereotypically representative of the positive connotations of “rural” America.

Further, schools in small towns function as community centers (Lyson, 2002), and this was evident in Tevis by the avid following among the townsfolk of the school’s athletic events. Indeed, community members have the opportunity to attend a sports function almost weekly throughout the school year. In a town that has no movie theater, no bowling alley, and no mall, the school’s athletic competitions provide a much-needed avenue for entertainment and community participation.

Residents Contribute to the Professional Conversation in Valuable Ways

The individuals in Tevis are capable and competent contributors to the discussion of teacher shortage. Though most are not “experts” in the field of education, they are participants in the system by the very nature of their residence in the community. When given the opportunity, many gladly discuss options to counter a shortage of “highly qualified” teachers. They sometimes envision solutions for themselves, and they seem to welcome input from others. Most important, even those who responded negatively

seemed to appreciate the chance to participate in the conversation. Their perspectives bring a much-needed *human* dimension to an otherwise academic discussion. Though most respondents were self-effacing when it came to their own knowledge and their own skills, they seemed, for the most part, to truly value the opportunity to dialogue with someone from outside the community, with the “other,” if you will. Further, I believe the very *act* of conversing about a state-controlled process such as certification of teachers served to empower the townsfolk of Tevis. Just as Greene (1978) asserts, qualitative research may empower individuals who feel disengaged from existing authority constructions. As delineated in the literature review, members of rural communities often feel detached from the workings of government, and education, as a government structure, is no exception. Consequently, they may feel powerlessness in the face of systems that dominate their lives. Greene (1978) affirms that the very processes of qualitative inquiry help people understand that they have the ability and the proficiency to effect change in their social environment, and I believe that the citizens of Tevis may have felt empowered, though briefly, talking with a “university researcher.”

Certification Requirements Remain Abstract

Most people with whom I spoke did not have a strong grasp of current certification requirements or of changes to requirements outlined in NCLB. Perhaps they exemplify the disengagement from power structures that Greene (1978) discusses. They understand that teaching school requires a bachelor’s degree, but they are unaware of specific course requirements. They have heard the phrase “No Child Left Behind” on the

news, and they know it pertains to education, but they are unfamiliar with the details of the law. Nonetheless, several townspeople suggested that university schools of education could reach more small-town inhabitants if they were to offer coursework on site or with technology, such as ITV and the Internet.

Financial Incentives and ATEPs

As Coeyman (2001) writes, states are increasingly offering teacher candidates financial incentives to work in high-needs areas. Some respondents mentioned loan forgiveness as a way of attracting teachers to Tevis, while others suggested dual-enrollment classes for high-school seniors to help ease the financial burden of higher education. Brenda, the school's only student teacher, felt especially burdened by debt, and she cited her financial obligations as the primary reason she would not consider teaching in Tevis—nor, for that matter, in Montana. Henderson, the Tevis School administrator, laments that he cannot compete with districts in other states, such as Nevada, that offer huge signing bonuses. He understands that teachers who choose to teach in rural Montana do not choose to do so for money, but he also understands that higher salaries equate to a larger applicant pool.

As described in the literature review, some ATEPs, such as the Northern Plains Transitions to Teaching Program and Troops to Teachers, have had success placing “highly qualified” individuals in hard-to-staff classrooms. Henderson, the Tevis School administrator, said that he would certainly consider alternatively certified teachers,

especially if the federal guidelines of NCLB were interpreted to stipulate that each middle and high-school teacher be certified in every subject he or she teaches.

Technological Solutions

Henderson and others in Tevis reported that technological innovations, such as ITV and online courses, could help alleviate teacher shortage and involve townspeople in higher education. As discussed in the literature review, some ATEPs include technology as an integral component. The Northern Plains Transition to Teaching (2004) program, for example, lists distance delivery and the development of a sound technological infrastructure as one of its primary goals. Other ATEPs are also providing solutions to rural districts via technological innovations (Jimerson, 2003; Hirsch, 2001).

Essential Findings

Overall, the townspeople in Tevis were quite vocal about their local school and its teachers. Though many had not previously considered the issues surrounding NCLB, teacher shortages, and “highly qualified” educators, most were more than willing to discuss their local school and its needs. They did not have preconceived ideas about what might help their school stave off teacher shortage, but they responded positively when presented with possible solutions or scenarios. Most respondents returned time and again to the issue of college expense. This is to be expected in a town where the median household income is significantly lower than the national average. See Table 1 for a summary of research questions and findings.

Table 1: Research Questions and Findings	
1. What answers to the problem of teacher shortage in the secondary content areas might those from the many walks of life in a rural Montana community envisage?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On-site education • ITV/Internet • College credit for high-school classes • Loan forgiveness
2. Would changes in secondary certification requirements encourage more rural community members to consider teaching middle and/or high school as a career? If so, what changes would need to be made?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Certification requirements remain nebulous • Respondents positive when offered possible scenarios (e.g., credit for life experience)
3. What role might Montana schools of education play in developing middle and high school teachers from within rural communities, especially in relation t recent changes in ESEA?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More “presence” in rural communities • On-site classes (e.g., weeklong intensives; Saturday classes) • Sponsorship of school activities • College credit for high-school classes
4. What importance do members of a rural Montana community attach to their local secondary school(s)?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The school is the heart of the community • Community members consistently identify with the school: “our volleyball team,” “our teachers” • The school building serves as a community gathering place

Synthesis of Meanings

It is the goal of phenomenological research to find meaning in process. The portrayal the researcher creates does not represent the phenomenon itself; rather, it represents meanings within the phenomenon. In the interpretative, qualitative mode, meanings are subject to the perspectives of the researcher and to the multiple perspectives of those engaged in the phenomenon under study. The process attempts to express an

authentic, yet multifaceted, portrayal of human experiences. Indeed, the qualitative model is, in many respects, an aesthetic model. Like art, it seeks not the representation of the object, but the representation of the *essence* of an object. To better understand the movement from the situational to the conceptual, see Table 2.

Table 2: Situational Understanding to Conceptual Understanding				
Situational	→	→	→	Conceptual
Secondary teacher shortage exists in Montana's rural schools, sometimes in conjunction with declining student enrollments.	Federal mandates outlined in NCLB may prove to exacerbate the problem.	The school plays a central role in the lives of the citizen of Tevis, but the people are disconnected from the power structures that run the school.	Through qualitative inquiry, respondents are empowered, but they deny their own knowledge base and skills sets.	Teacher as "other"

Success in any such endeavor is dependent upon the importance of the inquiry and the extent to which the researcher connects the many aspects of the phenomenon. The connections, of course, must be tied together to create an amalgamation of meanings—a whole that is inherently greater than the sum of the parts. As Moustakas (1994) writes, "The essences of any experience are never totally exhausted. The fundamental textural-structural synthesis represents the essences at a particular time and place from the vantage point of an individual researcher..." (p. 100).

My truth, then, of secondary teacher shortage in the age of NCLB, is one that depends on the truths of the inhabitants of Tevis, Montana. The work of sharing stories,

of remembering past teachers, of envisioning community solutions to the problem of teacher shortage, this work is an ongoing process that will never result in hard-and-fast “answers.” Rather, the meanings inherent are those that represent the human participants; these meanings extend beyond the issue of teacher shortage: Individuals have worth in a larger societal whole; each person’s voice adds value to conversations about education; those living in rural communities are directly and indirectly affected by pronouncements that impact their schools; perspectives heretofore not considered add to the body of knowledge that informs decision making. Further, participants in conversations about social structures are empowered by those conversations. The very act of asking questions and being questioned encourages the formulation of new ideas. In essence, my understanding of the phenomenon is this: Individuals in Tevis, Montana have contributed to the education profession’s comprehension of the issues pertaining to secondary teacher shortage in ways that are unique to Tevis, but that may be indicative of perspectives of similar rural communities. These perspectives add to the body of knowledge that contributes to today’s professional conversations. Most significant, in my opinion, is the perspective of the teacher as “other.” Because residents do not see themselves as qualified participants in the power structures that dictate the management of the school, they have come to view teachers not as products to be developed from within their own community; rather teachers are “others” who come from without.

Recommendations for Further Research

If a researcher conscientiously engages in careful consideration and inquiry throughout the discourse, she or he contributes something significant to the field. I hope, of course, that I have done this successfully. Nonetheless, questions remain.

Additional research is needed in the area of secondary teacher shortage in rural Montana. This could be accomplished by a combination of qualitative and quantitative studies that look at the dual issues of teacher shortage and rural population decline. As mentioned previously, the combination of these two concerns may have serious ramifications for the state's small-town and rural schools.

I suggest additional studies of other rural areas in Montana. It would be interesting to know how individuals in other communities view their schools and how they understand issues pertaining to the development of teachers. I also recommend studies that incorporate Montana's American Indian and Hutterite communities. The perspectives of individuals in these communities would add greatly to the professional conversation.

Finally, I urge schools of education in Montana to consider increasing off-campus, distance, and alternative education endeavors that may serve to develop professional educators from within rural communities. The one-size-fits-all prescriptive programs of the past do not address the changing needs of today's rural classrooms. If schools of education do not respond to issues of teacher shortage, they will find

themselves playing catch-up to innovative and creative programs such as Transitions to Teaching and to online university programs.

Summary

The process of engaging in phenomenological research is one of struggles and rewards. It brings to the fore the *human* dimensions of a given subject:

Through phenomenology a significant methodology is developed for investigating human experience and for deriving knowledge from a state of pure consciousness.

One learns to see naively and freshly again, to value conscious experience, to respect the evidence of one's senses, and to move toward an intersubjective

knowing of things, people, and everyday experiences. (Moustakas, 1994, p. 101)

Phenomenological research encourages us to dismiss our preconceived notions and our own sense of self-importance so that we may come to recognize the value of new perspectives, even as we strive to understand them. As a qualitative researcher, "only my own perception, my own acts of consciousness, must remain as pointers to knowledge, meaning, and truth" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 88).

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Appendix A

Initial Email Survey of Secondary Administrators

November XX, 2003

Dear ____:

I am a doctoral student at the University of Montana. As part of my dissertation for the School of Education, I am seeking to identify a rural community that has a shortage of secondary teachers and that may experience further shortages because of the "highly qualified" requirements outlined in the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). I will then conduct a qualitative research study within a community to determine how the population perceives the problem and how they might envisage solutions. Please complete this brief survey to help me identify a community for study. Your responses will be collated without identifying you or your community, and the original survey will be kept locked until the end of the study in May 2004 when it will be destroyed.

1. Are there secondary teachers within your school who are currently teaching out of field?
Y N
 - a. If yes, how many?
 - b. If yes, in what subject areas?
2. Are there secondary teachers within your school who are currently teaching with emergency or provisional credentials? Y N
 - a. If yes, how many?
 - b. If yes, in what subject areas?
3. Would you consider attracting and retaining teachers to be an area of concern in your school? Y N
 - a. If yes, why?
4. Are there secondary teachers within your school who will be impacted by the "highly qualified" requirements of NCLB? Y N
 - a. If yes, please explain:
5. Do you know of people in your community who you think would make good secondary teachers but who lack credentials? Y N
 - a. If yes, please explain:
6. In your opinion, would the members of your community be receptive to engaging in a conversation with me about their local high school? Y N
7. May I contact you for additional information? Y N
 - a. If yes, preferred method of contact: Email Phone Personal Visit
8. Please make any additional comments or suggestions:

I thank you for your willingness to help with this critical research. Please call or email me if you would like to discuss any aspect of this study further.

Hilve Firek, hfirek@selway.umt.edu
(xxx) xxx-xxxx

Appendix B

Semi-standardized Interview Questions

How would you describe a good secondary school teacher?

Do you think there's something special that makes a good secondary school teacher here in this community?

Recent changes in the law might make it more difficult to attract and keep good high-school teachers here. What do you think about this? (If necessary, explain "highly qualified" as defined by the federal government.)

Recent changes in the law provide opportunity for communities to be involved in teacher-education decisions. Offer examples and solicit opinions.

Have you ever thought about becoming a secondary school teacher?

- If yes, why and in what subject(s)?
- If no, why not?

Do you currently have any interest in teaching in a secondary school?

- If so, in what subject(s)?
 - What obstacles do you perceive that might prevent you from becoming a teacher? (If traditional form of teacher training is identified, ask follow-up question.)
 - If there were alternative ways for you to obtain teacher education here in your community, might you be likely to pursue them? (Ask for elucidation.)
 - What form(s) of such education might interest you?

Can you envision any role besides teaching that you might be willing to play in support of your community's secondary school? (Offer guiding options: e.g., tutor, library aide)

What might your community do to make teaching here a more attractive option?

What changes, if any, to your community's secondary schools might enhance your interest in teaching or taking another supporting role at those schools?

What is your overall opinion of your local high school?

If your local high school were to close because of consolidation, what impact would that have on your community?

Do you attend events at the high school? If so, what kinds of events do you attend? Why do you attend?

What are unique aspects of this community that a new teacher would need to know in order to be effective here?

If you could choose the "ideal" teacher for your community's school, what qualities would that teacher possess?

In your opinion, has your school been able to attract this kind of teacher? Why or why not?

Tell me about the quality of your school. What makes your school good or not good?

In your opinion, why would someone choose—or not choose—to be a teacher?

What training or preparation do you believe is necessary to be a good teacher?

How do teachers contribute to the community?

Do you have any friends or acquaintances here in the community that you think would make a good high-school teacher? If so, would you mind introducing me?